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EDITORIAL

The first two articles are dedicated to the Church in Asia which is preparing for the Special Synod of Bishops. Fr JEAN CHARBONNIER, MEP, presents a general outline of the Church's situation and conditions in different parts of Asia which vary widely, and the challenges the individual Churches are facing. —

The second contribution comes from Malaysia. Brother EDMUND CHIA, FSC, who works at the Department of Dialogue department of the FABC, insists that in our age of great transitions, the Church — conscious of the dynamic presence of the spirit — is called to a creative dialogue with the "other", a process which means both and renewal. —

The next three articles are dedicated to the question of Economics and Mission. In the afternoon meeting held on the Debt and the Jubilee 2000 in Rome, Fr MICHAEL SEIGEL, SVD and Sr MONIQUE FABRE, RSCJ, who are members of our SEDOS World Debt Working Group, explained the complex reality of the debt and its consequences, the idea of the Jubilee Campaign and showed how our congregations can get involved effectively, in north and south. —

DAWN MacKEEN, concludes this section with a report of a banking initiative for poor people. He shows us how the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has helped humble people to improve their life situations. —

In his contribution from Latin America, Fr JOSÉ MARÍA VIGIL, FCM, describes some elements of Latinamerican spirituality; an active way to follow Jesus who put all his energy and spirit into one uniting reality: the project of the kingdom.

We conclude this issue with the FINAL DECLARATION of a consultation on the response of the Church in Africa to the grave problem of the refugee crisis on the continent.

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SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 1998

Tuesday, 19 May (17:00h) - Saturday, 23 May (13:00h)
Casa Divin Maestro, Ariccia.

PROCLAMATION AND DIALOGUE IN MISSION TODAY

Msgr. Michael Fitzgerald, Mafr. (Rome)
(Pontif. Council for Interreligious Dialogue)

Sr Lucie Nzenzili Mboma, FMM. (Zaire, USA)
(Ex-Provincial of Zaire, Lecturer in USA)

Bro. Edmund Chia, FSC. (Malaysia)
(Secr. General of Department of Dialogue of FABC)

LE FERMENT CHRETIEN EN ASIE

Jean Charbonnier, MEP

Sous le ciel d'Asie, de rares clochers ont peine à percer la forêt des pagodes, des stupas et des minarets. Etant donné le caractère très minoritaire du christianisme en Asie, on peut se demander si la foi chrétienne exerce une influence quelconque sur les orientations idéologiques des dirigeants ou sur la mentalité des populations. C'est là pourtant une question qui préoccupe aussi bien l'Etat géant de Chine continentale que la petite cité-Etat de Singapour. Pour prendre la mesure de ces préoccupations, il n'est pas inutile en fait d'ausculter les sentiments des Singapouriens. Ces gens s'expriment sans fard, du moins dans les limites autorisées. Les grandes religions du monde coexistent dans ce petit Etat d'Asie du sud-est situé au carrefour des civilisations chinoise, indienne, malaise et occidentale. Un rapport d'enquête, daté d'octobre 1988, y note la progression particulièrement rapide du christianisme:

"Il est indiscutable que le nombre et la proportion des chrétiens dans la population ont augmenté ces dernières décennies. Suivant les recensements de 1921 et 1931, les chrétiens formaient seulement 2 à 3% de la population chinoise de Singapour. La proportion s'est élevée à plus de 10% en 1980. Nous n'avons pu établir une évaluation exacte du pourcentage des chrétiens à Singapour aujourd'hui, mais les évaluations courantes vont de 13 à 18%. Il est clair que cette croissance a été plus grande chez les protestants que chez les catholiques".

Le rapport précise les facteurs et les limites de cette croissance chrétienne:

"Qui sont les chrétiens (et les convertis au christianisme?)

Différentes sources confirment que les chrétiens, comparés aux croyants des autres religions, tendent à être plus jeunes, plus instruits, de statut socio-économique plus élevé en termes d'emploi, de revenu, d'habitat, formés dans des écoles de mission, issus du courant d'éducation en anglais, et parlant l'anglais comme langue principale à la maison ...

S'il y a un lien inhérent d'une part entre le niveau d'éducation et l'usage de l'anglais et d'autre part la conversion au christianisme, alors il est presque certain qu'avec le présent système d'instruction cette influence croissante du christianisme va se poursuivre. Nous croyons pourtant en même temps que le rythme de croissance va s'épuiser après avoir atteint dans sa totalité le segment de population défini ci-dessus comme réceptif au christianisme. L'expansion du christianisme atteindra un point de saturation qui sera contrecarré par les autres catégories religieuses telles que 'sans religion' et 'bouddhiste'. Comme le premier ministre l'a fait remarquer, Singapour est trop 'asien' pour devenir une société chrétienne" (Kuo, Eddie C.Y., Quah, John S.T., Kiong, Tong Chee, National University of Singapore, "Religion and Religious Revivalism in Singapore", rapport préparé pour le ministère du développement de la communauté, Octobre 1988).

Etrange rapport d'enquête qui mêle des jugements de valeur à des données qui se veulent objectives. L'allusion finale aux vues du premier ministre M. Lee Kuan Yew semble indiquer que, pour lui, le christianisme ne fait pas partie des valeurs asiatiques. Avec lui, certains gouvernants de tradition chinoise s'inquiètent de l'érosion des valeurs confucéennes, seules considérées comme "asiennes". Que devient cette société, pensent-ils, lorsque Noël est célébré avec plus de faste que le Nouvel An chinois?

Racines chrétiennes en Asie

Singapour étant une ancienne création britannique, il est naturel que le christianisme y paraisse lié à un apport occidental de la période coloniale. Nombre de pays asiatiques le pensent aussi pour leur propre compte, du fait que la grande expansion missionnaire en Asie a bénéficié de l'activité des puissances coloniales. Aujourd'hui, pourtant, l'optique tend à être différente: les pays d'Asie ont accédé à leur indépendance depuis un demi-siècle, l'Occident est en grande partie déchristianisé alors que les communautés chrétiennes d'Asie continuent à progresser. On s'intéresse aux racines historiques du christianisme en Asie.

L'origine géographique de la tradition judéo-chrétienne, aime-t-on à rappeler, est en Asie occidentale, chez les pasteurs nomades issus de la civilisation mésopotamienne. Les premières communautés chrétiennes sorties de Palestine se sont implantées solidement en Syrie, en Asie mineure, puis en Perse où elles étaient florissantes avant les invasions musulmanes. De la province romaine d'Asie elles ont gagné le monde gréco-latin à la faveur d'autres cultes orientaux en vogue dans l'Empire.

De Perse, les chrétiens se sont répandus en Inde. Les syro-malabars du Kerala peuvent tracer leur origine à un groupe de migrants venus de Perse au IV^e siècle. Au VII^e siècle, le Catholicos de Ctésiphon envoyait en Chine une mission officielle dirigée par l'évêque Abraham. La stèle nestorienne de Xi'an, gravée en 781, atteste l'arrivée de l'évêque 'Alopen' à Chang'an en l'an 635.

Au XVI^e siècle, à la suite de la renaissance européenne et de la réforme catholique du Concile de Trente, de grands missionnaires jésuites ont jeté les bases d'une symbiose entre le catholicisme et les traditions culturelles d'Asie. Robert de Nobili en Inde et Matteo Ricci en Chine conversaient en amis avec les sages de l'Asie. En Chine, les communautés catholiques de Shanghai et de Hangzhou ont pour fondateurs de grands lettrés confucéens convertis: Paul Xu Guangqi, Léon Li Zhicao et Michel Yang Tingyun. Le christianisme asiatique contemporain puise à ces sources antérieures à l'époque coloniale.

D'une manière générale, les intellectuels catholiques des pays d'Asie, qu'ils soient théologiens, historiens ou romanciers, tendent à mettre en oeuvre une expression de la foi chrétienne dans le contexte de leur tradition culturelle, suivant un principe qualifié dans les milieux ecclésiastiques du nom peu musical d'"inculturation". Dans les pays où les chrétiens sont bien acceptés et jouissent de moyens importants, leur effort d'inculturation joue en faveur d'une mise en relief des valeurs asiennes. Là au contraire où ils sont faibles, plus ou moins réprimés, voire méprisés, on se méfie plutôt de leurs relations avec l'étranger, on craint les aspects prophétiques et universalistes de leur foi. Il importe donc de mieux situer les milieux chrétiens plus influents.

Germination chrétienne en Asie contemporaine

Qui sont les chrétiens d'Asie aujourd'hui?

A part les Philippines, catholiques à 87%, les chré-

tiens catholiques, orthodoxes et protestants ne sont que de petites minorités dans l'immense continent asiatique: minorités plus fortes en Corée (25% en Corée du Sud dont 6% catholiques), au Vietnam (8% de catholiques), en Indonésie (8% dont 3% catholiques), à Sri Lanka 8%), en Malaisie (7% dont 3% catholiques); minorités infimes en Chine (2% sur le continent, 4% à Taiwan), au Japon (1,4% dont 0,34 catholiques), en Inde (1,9%), au Pakistan (1,7%). Il est vrai que ces minorités sont généralement bien vivantes, en croissance relativement rapide et souvent influentes.

Îlots ethniques

Au cours de l'histoire, les catholiques de Chine se sont souvent groupés en villages éloignés des centres urbains pour mieux s'abriter des persécutions chroniques. Ces chrétiens sont bien des Chinois de race Han mais qui ont pu être exilés sous l'Empire en pays ouïghour ou khazak; d'autres, originaires de la province du Shandong, se sont réfugiés en Mandchourie au cours du XIX^e siècle. En Mongolie intérieure, quelque 250 villages catholiques sont composés de migrants chinois Han. Les missionnaires belges de Scheut leur ont permis d'y cultiver des terres qu'ils avaient achetées aux Mongols. Solidement organisés suivant le rituel et les règles de vie catholique, ils forment des bastions chrétiens quasi indestructibles.

En d'autres pays d'Asie comme la Thaïlande et le Cambodge, les catholiques peuvent être de véritables minorités ethniques par la race. Ce sont souvent des Vietnamiens ou des Chinois d'origine, vivant en milieu culturel thaï ou khmer profondément bouddhiste. Dans ces pays, la religion tend à s'identifier à la race, de même qu'en Malaisie, être Malais, c'est être musulman.

La message chrétien a touché plus facilement les groupes minoritaires ethniques ou sociaux: aborigènes de Taïwan, Hmongs de Thaïlande, Zhuang, Sani, Yizu de la Chine du sud, parias en Inde. Plus ou moins rejetés par la société ambiante, économiquement pauvres et de croyances animistes régies par la coutume plutôt que par une doctrine bien structurée, ces minorités étaient plus perméables à l'évangélisation.

Quel est le tonus chrétien de ces convertis? Distinguons au moins trois cas:

- ceux dont la ferveur chrétienne s'est affaïdie avec le bien-être matériel. Faute parfois de pasteurs pour la soutenir, ils sont tentés de reprendre leurs pratiques animistes.
- ceux qui demeurent fidèles même en l'absence de

pasteurs, mais qui tendent à s'isoler du reste de la population.

- ceux qui font tache d'huile grâce à l'urbanisation et au développement des transports.

C'est souvent le cas en Chine où les chrétiens bâtissent de nouvelles églises dans les centres urbains.

Foyers d'influence

Le rayonnement des chrétiens déborde largement leur petit nombre et le cadre des églises. On les connaît par leurs oeuvres, leurs personnalités marquantes, par la presse et les médias qu'ils savent utiliser. Les écoles de mission, généralement très côtoyées à cause de leur discipline morale et de leur succès aux examens, ont ici et là formé l'élite du pays, des ministres ou leurs épouses, voire même l'impératrice du Japon. De nombreux Japonais adoptent un idéal chrétien sans être baptisés. Ils ont même un certain goût pour les rituels chrétiens qui leur sont accessibles. Une bénédiction du mariage à l'Eglise tend à remplacer la cérémonie shintoïste. Certains hôtels spécialisés dans les noces se passent même de l'Eglise et offrent à leur clientèle un rituel chrétien de leur cru.

Hôpitaux et cliniques tenus par des ordres religieux veillent à un bon accueil des malades en même temps qu'à la qualité des soins médicaux. Les asiles de vieillards où se dévouent sans compter les Petites soeurs des pauvres sont particulièrement appréciés dans des populations qui tiennent au respect des personnes âgées.

En Chine, en Indonésie, au Japon, en Inde, des universités catholiques et protestantes ont contribué à former des personnalités influentes. Des écrivains chrétiens ont su toucher le grand public. Quelques uns, tels le Chinois John Wu dans son ouvrage *Par delà l'Est et l'Ouest* ont décrit leur itinéraire de conversion, montrant qu'on peut être chrétien sans rien perdre des meilleures traditions asiatiques. Les grands pays d'Asie ont aussi leurs théologiens.

L'Institut allemand Missio, qui publie une bibliographie des études théologiques dans le monde, relève une quarantaine de titres de périodiques pour l'Asie dont 15 pour l'Inde seulement (*"Theology in Context"*, information sur des contributions théologiques d'Afrique, d'Asie, d'Océanie et d'Amérique latine, vol. 12, n. 2, 1995, publié par l'Institut de missiologie, Missio, Aachen, Allemagne). Cette liste est loin d'être exhaustive. Les travaux de théologie abordent les questions de fond sur le sens de la présence chrétienne en Asie. Les nouvelles concernant la vie catholique locale sont

glanées par l'agence U.C.A News basée à Bangkok et à Hongkong pour la partie chinoise. Cette information est reprise en français par la Société des Missions étrangères de Paris dans sa publication bi-hebdomadaire *Eglises d'Asie* (*"Eglise d'Asie"*, Agence d'information des Missions Etrangères de Paris).

Radio Veritas aux Philippines et divers émetteurs protestants couvrent de vastes secteurs de l'Asie. En divers pays comme à Taïwan, les chrétiens fournissent aussi des programmes de qualité à la télévision locale et produisent un riche échantillonnage de vidéo et audio-cassettes.

Structures continentales

Conscientes de la grande diversité des pays d'Asie, les Eglises catholique et protestantes ont pourtant créé des structures de coordination et de réflexion à l'échelon du continent asiatique. Leur approche pluraliste a permis des échanges d'expérience et une meilleure compréhension des particularités de l'Asie.

La FABC (Fédération des conférences épiscopales d'Asie) a été constituée dans les premières années 70 à la suite du 2ème concile du Vatican. Réunie à Taipei en 1974, elle étudiait d'emblée les conditions d'un développement plus autonome de l'Eglise locale. La Fédération comporte aujourd'hui 6 bureaux (religions, justice sociale, etc.) et une commission théologique (TAC). Cette dernière a organisé un premier colloque théologique international à Pattaya (Thaïlande) du 10 au 16 avril 1994.

Les théologiens y ont fait une analyse poussée des évolutions économiques, sociales et culturelles d'où ils ont tiré une vision renouvelée de la mission de l'Eglise. Ils requièrent une *"conscience plus profonde des ressources humaines"*, parmi lesquelles *"la personne humaine, la famille, la jeunesse et les femmes"*:

"Avec ces ressources humaines et d'autres, l'Eglise doit défier l'ambivalence des réalités asiatiques, utiliser les éléments positifs pour un développement humain..."

Nous sommes un petit troupeau en Asie. Nous sommes seulement l'une au milieu d'une multitude de communautés marchant vers une vie plus pleine. Notre contribution spéciale à cette marche est notre ambition d'arriver à une 'communauté de communautés' qui commencerait avec la famille, une nouvelle manière d'être Eglise qui amènerait le nouveau visage du Christ à l'intérieur même de la société asiatique" (*"Eglise*

d'Asie” Dossiers et documents n. 5/94, supplément EDA n. 177: “*Etre Eglise en Asie au XXème siècle; en marche avec l'Esprit vers la vie*”, déclaration finale du colloque de Pattaya, n. 22, T 24).

Le théologien indien Félix Wilfred propose une théologie asiatique de l'harmonie qui ne ferme pas les yeux sur les réalités conflictuelles. Il attire aussi l'attention sur les expressions de la foi dans la culture populaire et pas seulement chez les élites. De nombreux théologiens adoptent une attitude très positive à l'égard des grandes religions d'Asie où ils reconnaissent d'authentiques quêtes de vérité. Le “dialogue interreligieux” est une préoccupation fondamentale du christianisme en Asie. Ils soulignent le point suivant:

“Dans un contexte de fondamentalisme religieux, de violence inter-religieuse, de déstructuration sociale et de destruction écologique, nous affirmons la validité de l'intuition de la FABC d'être une Eglise de dialogue. Le dialogue est pour l'Eglise d'Asie le mode premier de la promotion de l'harmonie. Mais comme notre Maître, nous ne pourrions faire avancer l'harmonie qu'en prenant le chemin d'un amour préférentiel pour les pauvres”(*ibid.*, n. 43).

Les protestants disposent également d'une structure asiatique de réflexion et d'échanges: c'est la CCA (Conférence chrétienne d'Asie), un organisme qui fêta ses 38 ans d'existence en 1995.

La première rencontre eut lieu à Prapat en Indonésie en 1957. On y créa d'abord une Conférence des Eglises d'Asie orientale (EACC) avec participation de l'Australie et de la Nouvelle Zélande. Les objectifs furent précisés à la réunion de Kuala Lumpur en 1959:

“La réalisation de l'indépendance nationale, la marche vers un meilleur niveau de vie pour tous et la renaissance des anciennes religions contribuent à créer une situation nouvelle et révolutionnaire pour le commun des hommes... C'est dire que le peuple chrétien doit pénétrer tous les aspects de la vie de nos peuples, en politique, dans les services sociaux et nationaux, dans le monde de l'art et de la culture, oeuvrer en partenariat réel avec les non-chrétiens et témoigner du Christ dans ces domaines” (CCA News, vol. 30, n. 3, 4 et 5, mars, avril, mai 1995, pp. 5-6: M.M. Thomas, “*The Beginnings, what was the EACC about?*”)

L'une des questions auxquelles la CCA s'est trou-

vée confrontée dès les origines a été celle des ‘valeurs asiatiques’. Le Rev. Ron O'Grady, secrétaire de la CCA de 1973 à 1980, rappelle que dans les années 1950 et 1960 on discutait longuement de ce qui pouvait faire de l'Asie une région distinctive:

“une région de grande pauvreté - qu'en était-il du Japon? une région non chrétienne? Mais les Philippines? une région d'anciennes colonies? Mais la Thaïlande?... La question de l'asianité, poursuit-il, refit surface dans les années 1970 et 1980 quand il y eut de sérieuses violations des droits humains en de nombreux pays. Ferdinand Marcos aux Philippines, Indira Ghandi en Inde, et Park Chung Hee en Corée cherchèrent à étayer leur régime autoritaire en affirmant que les idées asiennes des droits de l'homme étaient différentes des définitions ‘occidentales’ de ces mêmes droits. Ceci leur permit d'être aussi autocrates qu'ils le désiraient et de se cacher derrière l'écran de la différence asiatique...”

Une fois de plus dans les années 1990, on nous demande de croire que certaines valeurs asiatiques spéciales rendent la région différente de autres lieux. Celles-ci sont maintenant définies par l'ancien premier ministre de Singapour, Lee Kuan Yew, surtout en termes de valeurs familiales plus fortes en Asie. C'est une perspective qui paraît curieuse lorsque son gouvernement au début de cette année a du passer une loi autorisant les parents à intenter un procès à leurs propres enfants pour assurer leur entretien. Dans quelques années, le mythe actuel des valeurs asiatiques aura rejoint les autres dans la poussière de l'histoire”(CCA News, *ibid.* p. 22, “*Asian Values, What holds it together?*”).

L'auteur, visiblement irrité, termine sur ces mots: “*Notre unité est dans ce que nous avons choisi et les valeurs qui nous réunissent sont les valeurs de l'Evangile*”.

Cette vision quelque peu subjective, formulée d'ailleurs par un Occidental, diffère peut être quelque peu des positions catholiques. Les documents officiels catholiques requièrent plus d'attention aux réalités culturelles et sociales. Ils soulignent sans doute l'identité des droits fondamentaux de l'homme en Orient et en Occident, mais en notant que leur expression culturelle peut être différente et que le champ d'application des droits secondaires peut varier suivant le degré de développement des pays.

L'Evangile dans le monde asiatique se heurte en fait aux mêmes défis. Catholiques et protestants cherchent à y réfléchir ensemble.

Dynamique conflictuelle

De par leur doctrine, les chrétiens sont 'dans le monde', mais ils ne sont pas 'du monde'. Ils visent à une libération des désirs égoïstes de ce monde et témoignent d'une révélation de l'amour divin dans le monde. Leur tâche en Asie tire son dynamisme d'oppositions conflictuelles :

Du sacré au séculier

Les peuples d'Asie ont le sens du sacré. Les rituels chinois, shinto, hindous, mélanésien et autres sont d'une grande richesse d'expression symbolique. La liturgie et les sacrements chrétiens s'inscrivent sans difficulté majeure dans cet univers religieux même si, au cours de l'histoire, ils ont pu se heurter aux rites les plus respectés de la tradition locale. Les gouvernements d'Asie autorisent généralement la coexistence de différents rituels pourvu qu'il y ait respect mutuel entre les religions et soumission aux lois. Les plus grandes difficultés proviennent ici des groupes religieux extrémistes et exclusifs. C'est le cas chez les 'fondamentalistes' hindous, musulmans et parfois chrétiens. Les mouvements sectaires bousculent la paix et l'ordre public par leur prosélytisme intempestif. Ils menacent les libertés individuelles quand ils cherchent à promouvoir une société politique entièrement sacralisée. Leurs agissements sont particulièrement nocifs dans des sociétés multiraciales comme celle de Malaisie. Des sectes musulmanes voudraient y imposer à tous la loi islamique, même aux Chinois et aux Indiens de religion bouddhiste, hindoue ou chrétienne.

Certaines sectes soi-disant chrétiennes ne sont pas exemptes d'un prosélytisme intempestif. Mais si les chrétiens soulèvent les inquiétudes du pouvoir politique, c'est plutôt à cause de leurs engagements séculiers. Leur foi en un Dieu unique et transcendant leur interdit une soumission inconditionnelle aux puissances de ce monde. Dans l'Empire romain, les chrétiens furent souvent condamnés à mort pour leur athéisme et leur refus de sacrifier aux dieux de l'Empire. Même leur culte du vrai Dieu a été dénoncé par les prophètes comme hypocrite lorsqu'il servait à couvrir l'injustice. L'Evangile annonce qu'il n'y a pas d'amour de Dieu sans amour du prochain et que le véritable amour du prochain doit révéler concrètement l'amour de Dieu, sa justice et sa vérité.

Les critiques de la religion en Occident ont provoqué une sécularisation accélérée du christianisme, certains abandonnant la pratique extérieure tout en voulant conserver l'esprit de l'Evangile. La sécularisation ne s'impose pas de la même façon en Asie, mais de nombreux chrétiens sont conscients des exigences politiques et sociales de leur foi. Les pouvoirs politiques s'inquiètent de ce qu'ils considèrent comme une ingérence indue dans leur domaine. En 1987, le gouvernement de Singapour a été jusqu'à arrêter une vingtaine de catholiques sous prétexte qu'ils étaient impliqués, plus ou moins à leur insu, dans un 'complot marxiste'. Les bureaux protestants de la CCA pour leur part, étaient invités à quitter Singapour. C'est que leurs publications se mêlaient d'affaires sociales et risquaient de nourrir une opposition politique à Singapour même ou dans des pays amis.

Conformisme et prophétisme

Des chrétiens conscients des exigences de l'Evangile sont choqués par le mépris des personnes qu'entraînent les transformations rapides de la société asiatique. Ils dénoncent injustices et exploitations. Prêtres ou laïcs, ils s'inspirent souvent d'une 'théologie de la libération' qui a repris à son compte certaines grilles d'analyse marxiste. Ces intellectuels chrétiens savent écrire et ce sont leurs articles qui inquiètent les autorités.

Leur utilisation occasionnelle des concepts marxistes de conscientisation et de lutte des classes risque parfois d'attirer le soupçon des autorités et de discréditer leur action. Si leur activisme démocratique était tempéré d'une certaine "inculturation", ils éviteraient sans doute de faire "perdre la face" aux personnes en charge, apprécieraient d'abord leurs réalisations positives et chercheraient à coopérer avec elles, quelle que soit leur allégeance politique, avant de faire passer leurs griefs. Ils obtiendraient alors plus facilement gain de cause. Si l'analyse des mécanismes d'exploitation est indispensable, il n'en est pas moins utopique de croire qu'un changement global du 'système' suffit à résoudre tous les problèmes. Les chrétiens des régimes populaires en ont fait la triste expérience.

En République populaire de Chine où le peuple est au pouvoir, il n'est pas question de laisser les chrétiens exercer leur prophétisme. La 'libération' a été accomplie en 1949 par l'armée rouge. Les chrétiens n'en ont pas été les acteurs mais les victimes. Aujourd'hui, ils n'ont le droit d'exister et de s'exprimer que dans un conformisme total aux directives du régime socialiste. C'est ainsi qu'après le nettoyage sanglant de Tiananmen, le 4 juin 1989, les Eglises ont

crés mais pour les soldats et policiers malmenés au cours l'opération. L'intégration politique des religions est très structurée. Chez les chrétiens, les évêques et pasteurs sont 'aidés' vigoureusement par les dirigeants 'patriotiques' qui reçoivent leurs directives des Bureaux des affaires religieuses, organismes d'Etat guidés eux-mêmes par le Front Uni du Parti communiste chinois.

Nombre de chrétiens, craignant pour l'intégrité de leur foi, n'ont jamais accepté de se soumettre au contrôle des Associations patriotiques. Les dissidents catholiques se sont ralliés autour de leur fidélité au pape. Les dissidents protestants sont surtout des Evangélistes fidèles au principe "il faut obéir à Dieu plutôt qu'aux hommes". La simple obéissance aux commandements de Dieu fut d'ailleurs souvent la raison pour laquelle les chrétiens refusèrent leur coopération à un régime qui leur demandait de mentir, voire de tuer des innocents, comme ce fut le cas au cours des campagnes politiques des premières années 1950. Soucieux d'être bons citoyens, les chrétiens peuvent se soumettre aux régimes les plus autoritaires et même rendre des services fort appréciés de leurs concitoyens. Mais ils ne peuvent se faire les complices d'injustices notoires. Ils doivent alors faire usage du peu de moyens d'intervenir dont ils disposent et chercher l'appui d'autorités compétentes et responsables. Il ne leur appartient pas de 'changer le système', sauf si des partis d'opposition bien organisés leur offrent une possibilité de choix. Mais ils se trouvent alors en régime démocratique.

Eglise universelle et communautés locales

L'Eglise du Christ, 'sacrement d'unité', vise à rassembler la famille humaine dans l'unité et la paix. Cette perspective universaliste mine de l'intérieur les particularismes locaux et les régimes autarciques. En même temps, cette Eglise n'a d'existence concrète que dans la communauté locale qu'elle rassemble dans un contexte culturel et politique spécifique.

Certaines Eglises protestantes, dans la logique même de leurs origines, ont pu s'adapter plus facilement que les catholiques aux exigences nationalistes des divers pays. Il existe ainsi une Eglise nationale des Philippines et des Eglises chinoises autonomes sous contrôle gouvernemental.

L'universalité de l'Eglise est beaucoup plus structurée chez les catholiques puisqu'elle se traduit concrètement par le respect de la primauté du pape, suc-

cesseur de Saint Pierre, chef des apôtres, garant de l'unité des chrétiens et de l'intégrité de la foi. L'exercice de la primauté pontificale exige que l'ensemble des évêques demeurent en communion avec le pape. Quel que soit le droit de regard des autorités civiles, la nomination des évêques doit être approuvée par le pape. Le Saint-Siège peut d'ailleurs favoriser les bonnes relations entre les Eglises locales et les pouvoirs politiques par l'intermédiaire de délégués apostoliques ou de nonces ayant statut diplomatique.

A l'époque coloniale, ces interventions du Saint-Siège au profit des Eglises locales ont été parfois contrecarées par les puissances occidentales. Aujourd'hui, le Saint-Siège continue à soutenir activement le plein développement de l'Eglise en Asie et le pape Jean-Paul II a déjà proposé la réunion d'un synode de l'Eglise en Asie. Parmi la centaine de cardinaux susceptibles d'être élevés au Siège pontifical, il y a des cardinaux indiens, japonais, indonésien, chinois, coréen, philippin. Quant aux évêques d'Asie, ils sont presque tous asiatiques aujourd'hui.

Christianisme et modernisation

Aussi étrange qu'il paraisse à un Occident toujours en mal de déchristianisation, le christianisme en Asie est associé à la modernité. En 1966, un étudiant chinois de l'université de Singapour s'exprimait ainsi:

'Dans le monde moderne, à cause de l'avance en science et en technologie, la mobilité sociale élevée et la décomposition du système de parenté et de la grande famille, la religion traditionnelle chinoise n'a pas su faire face aux nouveaux besoins du temps. Elle est devenue la religion des femmes et de la vieille génération qui avait été élevée suivant le mode traditionnel. Il y a encore 66% des familles des étudiants qui croient en la religion chinoise. Cependant, la tendance à la sécularisation s'est manifestée clairement chez la vieille génération elle-même. Il y a ainsi 25% des familles dont les parents sont 'libre-penseurs' et 7,5% des familles dont les parents croient au christianisme, une religion qui peut faire face aux besoins du monde moderne et qui est moins associée à la magie et à la superstition' (Foo Ming Yeow, "Nanyang Students and their social setting", étude non publiée. Département d'études sociales appliquées, université de Singapour, novembre 1966).

Cette étude portait sur les étudiants de l'université chinoise Nanyang et non sur les Jeunes de langue anglaise soi-disant bouillon de culture idéal de la con-

version au christianisme suivant le rapport de 1988 cité plus haut.

En Chine même, il est question aujourd'hui d'une 'fièvre chrétienne' chez les jeunes et les universitaires. Est-il de bon ton d'être chrétien pour être moderne? Il est peu probable que les jeunes convertis chinois cèdent à un attrait de mode, car il en coûte encore d'être chrétien. Bien des postes intéressants risquent d'être fermés à qui inscrit son appartenance chrétienne sur un formulaire de candidature.

En outre, les réformes économiques de ces dernières années et le développement d'une société de consommation engendrent une mentalité peu favorable aux engagements chrétiens. Le matérialisme pratique de course individualiste à l'argent et au plaisir est bien éloigné d'un esprit chrétien de sacrifice et d'amour désintéressé.

Un grand vide spirituel s'est peut-être créé à la suite d'une perte de foi dans l'idéologie marxiste. Les causes de cette désillusion sont entre autres la corruption de nombreux cadres communistes et à une critique plus scientifique des phénomènes d'aliénation en régime socialiste. Les théories économiques de Marx sont mieux situées historiquement. On découvre aussi les idéaux humanistes du jeune Marx et les sources judéo-chrétiennes de ses vues sur la mission rédemptrice des plus déshérités.

Un groupe de professeurs non-chrétiens dirigé par Liu Xiaofeng, professeur de culture comparée à Shenzhen, a entrepris une étude systématique des théologiens occidentaux. Alors qu'autrefois, on ne s'intéressait qu'aux sciences et techniques de l'Occident, on s'efforce aujourd'hui de déceler les sources de son dynamisme spirituel. On découvre surtout comment le christianisme affronte le mal de façon réaliste, la conscience du péché, le sens de la mort tragique du Christ et l'histoire du salut: autant de thèmes existentiels qui sont absents de la vision chinoise d'une harmonie anthropo-cosmique d'ordre rituel.

D'une manière générale, les peuples d'Asie les plus engagés dans un processus rapide de modernisation sont en même temps bouleversés par la désintégration de leurs normes éthiques traditionnelles. Le témoignage de chrétiens éclairés des pays les plus développés leur suggère que la foi chrétienne peut servir de contrepoison aux effets les plus malsains de la modernisation.

La défense des droits humains fondamentaux par

l'Eglise ne les laissent pas insensibles. Leur quête de démocratie ne peut se passer de références éthiques. Elle doit être fondée sur une certaine vision de la dignité humaine et du bien commun. Sans bien connaître la doctrine sociale de l'Eglise, ils savent qu'elle ouvre une voie médiane entre un libéralisme économique anarchique et un collectivisme totalitaire.

Certains signes des temps autorisent une perspective optimiste: fécondées par l'apport chrétien, les grandes traditions culturelles de l'Asie pourraient effectivement connaître un nouvel essor et contribuer au bien-être de la société internationale. L'élaboration d'un christianisme asiatique peut en outre ouvrir une nouvelle étape dans la vie et la pensée de l'Eglise universelle. Tout en trouvant une place dans la panoplie des 'valeurs asiennes', le christianisme tend à rompre les murailles des autarcies culturelles les plus conservatrices; mais il favorise en même temps une nouvelle fécondation de la conscience mondiale en faisant connaître en Occident les traditions éthiques de l'Asie. Au seuil du troisième millénaire, les craintes et soupçons du passé semblent céder la place à un horizon de confiance et d'enrichissement mutuel.

Notons enfin que la diffusion en Asie de principes d'origine chrétienne déborde largement le cadre des Eglises catholique et protestantes. Bien que sécularisée et parfois hostile au christianisme, la culture occidentale véhicule encore nombre de valeurs chrétiennes dans ses traditions juridiques, éducatives, sociales. Cette culture réinterprétée dans le cadre de la modernité fournit des modèles à tous les pays en voie de modernisation rapide. Dans la mesure où ces pays cherchent à sauvegarder leurs propres richesses humaines, ils peuvent de leur côté découvrir des soutiens moraux dans les valeurs essentielles de la culture occidentale. C'est ainsi que la Chine contemporaine a pu produire des "chrétiens culturels", c'est-à-dire des experts en théologie chrétienne qui ne sont pas baptisés et qui ne souhaitent d'ailleurs pas appartenir à une Eglise.

Il est possible que des minorités asiennes puisent dans le ferment chrétien une assurance et un dynamisme qui leur permettent de mieux cultiver leurs valeurs traditionnelles et de faire ainsi lever la masse de leurs énormes populations. Elles pourraient alors faire valoir ces ressources idéologiques face à un Occident vidé de ses références éthiques et y trouver un nouvel atout pour leur essor économique.

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A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH

Edmund Chia, FSC

Subtitled, 'Turning 20, Embracing Dialogue', this article sees the Church as coming of age, with clear choices before her, choosing certainty or mystery, or choosing the familiar over the risky. In an age of transition, of great technological development and in a world more consciously pluralist, the author writes of factors facilitating dialogue with 'the other', and the process, price and prospects for dialogue. Edmund Chia is a Malaysian La Salle Brother with graduate degrees in psychology and religious studies. He was a participant at 'Asian Journey' in Multan, January 1997.

If we consider one century of world history as the equivalent of one year of growth in the human life-cycle, then Christianity is coming to 20 years of human age. In other words, the Church is about to celebrate her 20th birthday, entering into young adulthood, and facing the concomitant challenges in life. She is entering a phase where she will shed some of her old ways of being in favour of new ways of being. Social and environmental factors will propel the Church to grow, to adapt and to change, as will the personal maturation directed by her inner genetic blueprint. No longer is the Church a teenage adolescent dependent primarily upon parental support and guidance, nor has she become a full-grown adult, totally independent and self-supporting. (Obviously, this growth pattern is typical more of a middle-class urban life-style, where one goes through high school and college and then only seeks employment and settles down with a family). She continues to be comfortable with patterns of behaviour, concepts and affections peculiar to her home culture but is continuously challenged by different sets of ideals, values, and thrusts of the new world culture. She continues to imagine her own home as the best and the one and only home as she is challenged by an awareness that other homes are equally good and that some may even have a better family spirit. Suffice it to say, she begins to see things in a new light and perceives life and the universe from a broader perspective. She no longer relies solely on all that she learnt from her parents and other adults at home as she begins to see that others have as much to teach as her own primary caretakers. She tries to break away from the reins of parental control while fearing to tread the future without their protection. As she goes about in search of a job, a life vocation and a life-partner to make a new home, she cannot but experience this conflict between the old and the new, the past and the present, the known and the unknown.

Adulthood

In short, the Church is in a period of transition, a transition from the stability of homelife to the unpredictable work-force and new world. It is a time between parenthesis, a time between eras (John Naisbitt, *Megatrends*, Warner Books, 1984, p. 279). A time where the present is bracketed off from both the past and the future. It is neither here nor there yet. The secure past of the absolute and 'either-or' phase has not yet been surpassed. Neither has the future of ambiguity and 'both-and' phase been arrived at yet. The known past is held on to with a loosening grip, while fear of the unknown future prevents her from taking that leap forward. It is in this context that prophets will come by way of persons who dare to address this 'in-between' period with creativity, daring and foresight. It is they who will pave the way for a *New Way of Being Church*. It is they who will invite the Church to face the new challenges with courage and to look upon this new crisis of identity as opportunities for growth. It is they who will help bridge the gap between the old and the new by appropriating themes from Scripture and Tradition to reconstruct a new way of being Church which is relevant to the development of modern society and in harmony with the pluralistic cultures of our time.

Dialogue as life-option

Just as every person reaching adulthood has to make fundamental decisions about her/his life-options, the emerging adult Church is also confronted with this crisis of fundamental options. For the individual this will involve decisions about career, lifestyle, friendship types, hobbies, location of work and home, partner and family size. Whereas, for the Church it will mean decisions about spirituality, mission, administrative styles, participation of the laity, social mission,

option for the poor, inculturation, attitudes towards the world, towards other Christians, and towards other religions and a host of other concerns. While all of these ought to be the concerns of the universal Church, the Church in Asia in particular has to make a fundamental decision with regard to her attitude towards other religions. Not only because Christians number no more than two or three per cent of the population of Asia, but more so because it will be the Asian Church, if anyone at all, who will lead the way towards a more progressive attitude towards the other religions of the world. It is, as it were, the Holy Spirit specially ordaining the Church of Asia to show the universal Church what it really means to be living in harmony with the other great wisdom and religious traditions of humankind. It is a fundamental decision which will probably include a life-option to be in constant dialogue with the great religions of the world. Implicit in this dialogue will be the continuous search for the true meaning and relevance of Christ. Christianity and the Church in a multireligious and multicultural context.

And so, as the universal Church, in preparing to enter the third millennium has announced the Year 2000 as the 'Great Jubilee', a year of special joy and thanksgiving for the grace of the salvation brought by Christ, (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 16), it will do well to reflect upon this in the context of Asia. If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today (cf. Heb 13:8) (*ibid.*, n. 56), this reflection is especially important in Asia where the majority of the population go on with life, independent of Christ. So, while the Church in Asia is more concerned with why Christianity has not made a more significant impact in its peoples, the question which the universal Church seems to be asking is regarding Christianity's attitude towards the various religions of Asia. Perhaps the question which should be asked is how Christ and Christianity can fit more appropriately into the religiously pluralistic Asian world. Or, instead of asking what Christianity can assume and adapt from other religions, isn't it more important to ask how Christianity can adapt itself to Asian religiousness in order to become more relevant? Such questions will shift the focus of attention from the Church to the context of Asia (Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East?: Asian Challenges and Christian Involvement*, Madras: SIGA Press, 1991, p. 209). In light of recent developments in theological thought and recent ecclesial pronouncements about Christianity, Christ, the Church, and its attitude towards other religions, such questions are not completely out of line. Even if straightforward answers are not forthcoming, it is important that the correct questions continue to

be asked. On her part, the Church will have to be more dependent upon divine guidance and be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, which blows where it wills (cf. Jn 3:8), and even in and through the other religions of the world (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, n. 12). Dialogue with them will probably be the means where some of these questions will be answered.

Preparedness for Dialogue

While the idea of dialogue with the religions of the world is a recent phenomenon, one can attribute its impetus to certain factors, both from within and without the Church. This is likened to the epigenetic principle where individual development is contingent upon both the social-environmental factors as well as the inner genetic blueprint and programming. The nature of development is therefore a product of external and internal forces for change. This is very much what is happening to the Church especially with the socio-cultural or environmental changes of the last two centuries and more so with her own internal maturation of the last 50 years. It is, as it were, the periods since her 18th birthday that societal changes had the greatest impact and the periods since her 19th birthday that the Church's growth spurt facilitated the praxis of dialogue.

1. Environment: extra-ecclesial factors facilitating Dialogue

Because present-day Christianity is very much conditioned by the Western world. 'The shift in the understanding of the structure of reality and in the understanding of truth that has taken place in Western civilization and beyond throughout the 19th and 20th centuries' (Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection*, Fortress Press, 1990, p. 6) has had a great impact on the Church in general and Christian theology in particular. While previously truth was understood in static, absolute, exclusivistic, monologic, and 'either-or' terms, the shift has made for understanding more in dynamic, conditional, perspectival, interpretive, dialogical and in 'both-and' terms. The classicist and absolutist views in metaphysics, epistemology, and the various branches of philosophy are giving way to more mutual, relational and dialogical views. The advent of historical consciousness, hermeneutics, the sociology of knowledge, developmental-psychology, and other fields of study have in part been responsible for this paradigm shift (*ibid.*, pp. 5-21). The consequence of this shift is the relativisation of all forms of knowledge including religious knowledge and faith. As such, dialogue with

other forms of faith and religious knowledge has become an imperative if one is sincere about the search for Truth.

Of more recent years, there has been a surge of knowledge in the world about religions. Not only do we now have access to books, information, scriptural texts and ideas about one's own religion, we can also get those of other religions with relative ease. Technological advances, the internet, websites, CD-Roms and others have escalated this a hundred-fold. Today, the study of world religions and comparative philosophy of religions are readily available in many schools, colleges and other educational institutions. Translations of the scriptures and holy books of many religions are on sale in numerous bookstores around the world. New reports about religious activities, documentaries on religious practices, and films with religious themes abound. There is therefore no escape from this realm of knowledge that other religions exist and have their own intricate symbol systems and institutions. While previously it might have been possible to imagine that only one's own religion is true and exists, the information age of today can easily dismiss that notion as illusory.

More important still, direct contacts with peoples of other religions have become a reality for most people around the globe. While this may not be a new phenomenon for Asian Christians, who for the most part of the last two millennia have lived side by side with persons of other religions, it is a rather new experience for those living in the Western world. But, because the Church in Asia has, until very recently, been more a Western Church transplanted into Asia, the fact that Christians lived alongside their neighbours of other faiths for centuries did not have any bearing on universal Christian attitudes and theologies as these were mostly derived from the mother Church from the West. This recent global phenomenon of proximity with persons of other religions is brought about by a variety of factors, like immigration, higher education, tourism and transnational business corporations. While previously it could have been possible to simply ignore 'the other' whom one knew of only from a distance, today the intimate bonds and close friendships are forcing people to apprehend 'the other' with greater care and interest. Significant is the fact of observing 'the other' as living whole and holy lives not in spite of but because of her/his religion (*ibid.*, p. 41). The sincere Christian in her/his search for the fullness of Truth cannot but extend this search into the other religions of the world. Dialogue, therefore, is an appropriate means to this end.

The volatile socio-political climate in numerous countries throughout the world is also one of the major factors leading religions to the praxis of dialogue. Considering that not a few wars and conflicts have been waged in the name of God and religion, religionists are thus duty-bound to address the issue of inter-religious conflicts, intercommunal wars and religious fanaticism. The alternative would be to leave these religio-socio-political issues in the hands of politicians and communal leaders, many of whom, unfortunately, have agendas less than noble. Thus if religionists do not take seriously this mandate for dialogue, the alternative would probably be none other than death (cf. Leonard Swidler *et al.*, *Death or Dialogue?: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*, SCM Press, 1990). Another equally important reason for religions to be in dialogue with one another is that of suffering humanity and ecology. Human rights abuses, massive poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, social injustices, drug addiction, prostitution, slavery, ecological destruction, indiscriminate deforestation, global warming, environmental pollution, acid rain, and a host of other humanly caused curses provide the agenda for dialogue. The magnanimity of this eco-human suffering suggests that dialogue is imperative as no religion can possibly do it alone in this battle against global suffering (cf. Paul Knitter, *One Earth many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, Orbis Books, 1995).

2. Genetic Blueprint: intra-ecclesial factors facilitating Dialogue

If we have to look for the innate structures or the inner programming within the Christian tradition which produced the necessary disposition for the Church to engage in the praxis of dialogue, we will have to begin with the scriptural texts. The most basic motive for dialogue is that God is the 'One who creates, upholds, and lovingly wills to redeem all that is' (Gn 1:1, 2; Tm 4:4,5, in Durwood Foster, 'Christian Motives for Interfaith Dialogue', in Peter Phan (ed), *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism*, Paragon House, 1990, p. 22). Moreover, being created in the image and likeness and filled with the Spirit of God (Gn 1:26, 2:7), human beings, whether Christian or not, have a special uniqueness and status in God's plans. 'Human beings, that is to say, are uniquely potentiated as bearers of the meaning and truth of God (Durwood Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 23). In the New Testament, God's plan for the cosmos, as revealed through Jesus Christ, is the reconciliation of all of creation to God himself (cf. Eph 1:9-10, 1 Cor 1:26-27). 'There is no one outside this universal salvific will of God, for as St Paul says,

“Our God Saviour, ... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:3-4)’: (Jose Kuttianimattathil, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Study of the Indian Christian Attempts since Vatican II*, Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti, 1995, p. 580) ‘to bring this plan to fulfilment, God has been active in the world through the Word and the Spirit from the beginning of time. The Word, through whom all things were made, has always been guiding and illumining humans so that they might not walk in darkness (Jn 1:1-9)’ (*ibid.*, p. 581). When the Word became flesh, God’s plan for the reconciliation of all of humanity was realised as the Word ‘has in a certain way united himself to each man’ (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Thus, ‘it was our entire human nature that he assumed’ (*Ad gentes*, n. 3) and ‘his redemptive death too, was for the whole of humankind’ (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Hence, in and through him, God has ‘reconciled us to himself and to one another’ (*ibid.*).

While there is no doubt enough genetic endowment within Scriptures for the Church to reckon that dialogue with the other religions of the world is essential to discover the fullness of God’s plans, it was not until the last 50 years that this came to be. This was a result of several factors. For one, Origen’s rigid interpretation of Cyprian’s affirmation of *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the Church) which dominated most of Christian history was officially condemned by the Church’s Magisterium in the year 1949 (Josef Tomko, ‘Missionary Challenges to the Theology of Salvation’, in Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler (eds.) *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, p. 17). But a more significant event was the Second Vatican Council, summoned by Pope John XXIII for the purpose of *aggiornamento* or renewal. The Council, meant to update the Church, opened its windows to allow fresh air into the stuffy rooms of the Church. The Council Fathers accepted the challenge, and constantly spoke of the ‘signs of the times’ as an expression of the will of God (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 4; *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 14; *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 4, 11; *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 9) (Walbert Buhlmann, *With Eyes to See: Church and World in the Third Millennium*, Orbis books, 1990, p. 11).

Specifically, in the area of ‘dialogue’, it was Pope Paul VI (John XXIII’s Successor) who brought it to the fore in his very first Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, published in 1964. It was in *Ecclesiam suam* that the term ‘dialogue’ is found for the first time in any Church Encyclicals ever. This is by no means insignificant, as

it implies the Church acknowledges she has something to learn from the outside world as well. No one who believes s/he has the full possession of Truth would ever think of engaging in dialogue. ‘Dialogue is demanded nowadays’, (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 77, 78) writes Paul VI. ‘The dialogue of salvation was opened spontaneously on the initiative of God; he loved us first’ (*ibid.*, n. 72). Paul VI then goes on a little further to proclaim that ‘Dialogue is, then, a method of accomplishing the apostolic mission’ (*ibid.*, n. 81). With respect to other religions, Paul VI states unambiguously that ‘We recognise and respect the moral and spiritual values of various non-Christian religions, and we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideals or religious liberty, human brotherhood, good culture, social welfare and civil order’ (cf. *ibid.*, n. 112). Subsequent documents of the Second Vatican Council contain even more explicit statements *vis-a-vis* other religions of the world. Specifically, *Nostra aetate* (NA), *Lumen gentium* (LG), *Gaudium et spes* (GS), *Dignitatis humanae* (DH), and *Ad gentes* (AG) make direct references to them. For example, there is mention of the need to recognise within religions ‘elements of truth and grace’ (AG, n. 9), ‘riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations’ (AG, n. 11), ‘a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men’ (NA, n. 2) and recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit (GS, n. 11, AG, n. 4) and the presence of ‘Seeds of the Word’ (LG, n. 17, AG, n. 11). The Council also promotes an attitude of profound respect toward the religions of the world (AG, n. 10) and specifically names and describes the values in each of the major religions (NA, n. 2). It encourages dialogue and collaboration (*ibid.*, n. 2) with these religions for it is through dialogue that Christians can ‘receive the inspiration of the Spirit and follow them ardently’ (GS, n. 92) (James Kroeger, ‘Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue’, in *JMJ* Winter 1996, p. 242). This new wind of change which happened at the universal Church level began to see fruits at the local and regional Episcopal Conferences. In Asia, as a follow-up from Vatican II, the Bishops at the First Asian Bishops’ Meeting in Manila in 1970 expressed that ‘we are more than ever convinced that dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment is to other faiths is increasingly important’. They then pledged themselves ‘to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development’ (G. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970-1991*, Claretian

Publications, 1992, pp. 3-7).

Since the Second Vatican Council numerous other documents and statements affirming dialogue have been promulgated. But here, a look at the present Pope's attitude might also shed more light on the importance and urgency of dialogue with the other religions of the world. On 5 February 1986, Pope John Paul II reminded us, 'By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God'. Then, on 28 April 1987, John Paul II proclaimed, 'Interreligious dialogue is a work desired by God and is an integral element of the Church's evangelising mission'. When in Indonesia in 1989, he urged, 'Respectful dialogue with others also enables us to be enriched by their insights, challenged by their questions, and impelled to deepen our knowledge of the truth. Far from stifling dialogue or rendering it superfluous, a commitment to the truth of one's religious tradition by its very nature makes dialogue with others both necessary and fruitful' (James Kroeger, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246).

The Process of Dialogue

We have thus far been discussing the importance of dialogue and the various factors, intrinsic and extrinsic to the Church, that have prepared the way for it. But what actually is entailed in the Church's dialogue with other religious traditions? What does it really mean to be engaged in the praxis of dialogue? What is the process like? What are some of the conditions imposed on those entering into dialogue? And what might be the price of dialogue?

In attempting to answer some of the above questions, Leonard Swidler's *Dialogue Decalogue* or *Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue* (Leonard Swidler, 'Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix for All Reflection Today', in Leonard Swidler (ed.), *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 13-16). To begin with, dialogue is a 'conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that both can change and grow' (*ibid.*, p. 6). John Paul II states in his 1990 papal Encyclical, *Redemptoris missio*, that dialogue is 'a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment' (n. 55). Hence, dialogue is about mutual learning, changing and growing. This happens precisely because there are real differences between the other's religion and mine. These differences are the 'stuff' or ingredients for learning. Upon learning the new 'stuff' one would have changed as a result of new insights gained and grown as a re-

sult of new attitudes formed especially regarding the 'other' and her/his religion. But, in no way is it suggested that we may force or induce the other to learn, change or to grow. It is a totally voluntary process, a process which must be respected by all who come to the dialogue table. But, by the very fact that all who come to the dialogue table would have the intention of learning, changing and growing, the question of forcing change should not even arise.

Next, for learning to take place, the partners-in-dialogue have to be committed to witnessing their respective faith. The 1991 Vatican document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, is emphatic that dialogue requires 'a mutual witness to one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's respective religious convictions' (n. 40). In other words, we do not enter into dialogue with the intention of learning only. We also need to give witness to our own beliefs. We do this not with indifference, but with full passion and conviction. Yes, we want to persuade our dialogue partners to know, understand, appreciate, and believe in what we believe. 'We want our partners to see what we have seen; we want their lives to be touched and transformed as ours have been. Yes, let me use the offensive word: we want to *convert* our partners' (Paul Knitter, 'Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?' in *Death or Dialogue?*, *op. cit.*, p. 23). But this conversion is not so much a 'winning-over' as it is a 'sharing-with'. The outcome is not so much 'win-lose' as it is 'win-win'. Just as you are able to convert me, I, too, am able to convert you. We both go away excited about our personal 'success' as we also go away 'converted' by the other. We are both mutually enriched and mutually transformed. We both leave the dialogue table with broadened horizons in our perception and understanding of 'the other,' and her/his religion as well as about truth and life in general.

For learning and witnessing to take place, 'each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity' (Leonard Swidler, 'Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue', *op. cit.*, p. 14). There are no half measures here. 'Conversely, each participant must assume complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners' (*ibid.*). That is to say, the praxis of dialogue entails the cardinal virtues of trust and honesty, without which there will be no dialogue. If this prerequisite is ensured, even if very little is learned or very few changes occur, the fact that dialogue has facilitated honesty and trust between the partners-in-dialogue is itself a good enough reason to promote it. Like Maryknoll missionary Bob McCahill whose primary mission objective is the building of trust

and friendship as he lives amongst rural poor Muslims in Bangladesh (Robert McCahill, 'A Letter from the Mission Field', in *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, p. 99), a primary aim of dialogue is also the building of trust and friendship in an environment which is often lacking in these basic ingredients for peaceful existence.

Another condition for dialogue is that participants, besides engaging in interreligious dialogue, must also engage in intra-religious dialogue as well. Put another way, while dialoguing with persons of other religions is important, of equal importance is the dialogue with persons from within one's own religious tradition. Thus, Christian interreligious dialoguers have also to be in constant dialogue with other Christians within their community. This is because the learning change, and growth envisaged in dialogue is not so much in reference to the individual as it is to the community. Thus, dialogue is a 'corporate' activity, and not a personal one. Besides representing one's own community, one also has the responsibility to return to share the fruits of dialogue with them.

Flowing from this, persons entering into dialogue should also 'be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological tradition' (Leonard Swidler, 'Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue', *op. cit.*, p. 15). Thus, if one enters into interreligious dialogue with the belief that one's own tradition has all the correct answers and nothing can ever be false, then one has shut out learning. For, learning is not only about 'the other' or the other's religion, but learning is also very much about oneself and one's own religion. *Dialogue and Proclamation* puts it this way: 'The way Christians understand their religion and practice may be in need of purification' (n. 32). In this respect John Paul II also acknowledges that 'other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church' (RM, n. 56). As we learn more about 'the other' and her/his religion, we also re-view ourselves and our own religion. If revision and change are called for, in all honesty one will have to revise and change. *Dialogue and Proclamation* is no less assertive as it states that dialogue is about 'the will to engage together in commitment to the truth and the readiness to allow oneself to be transformed by the encounter' (n. 47). The document even goes a little further to spell out what could even happen: 'In this process of conversion, the decision may be made to leave one's previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself toward another' (*ibid.*, n. 41). In simple terms, the search for Truth knows no bounds, even if it means converting to an-

other religion.

The 'Price' of Dialogue

Thus far, we have seen that there is no question about the importance of dialogue. The long-term positive effects of dialogue can easily be deduced from the various reasons and factors which encourage the praxis of dialogue. To name a few: dialogue has the potential for forging co-operation, building trust and friendships, promoting eco-human liberation, realising God's plan of unity for humanity, and facilitating the discovery of the fullness of Truth. But, as with anything else, there is also the negative side to the picture, namely the 'price' we pay in interreligious dialogue. And very often, in view of this potential 'price', many are reluctant to venture into the praxis of dialogue. While quite a few will look upon this as 'price' or negative effects of dialogue, the more courageous and optimistic view them as positive sources for growth.

Specifically, we are referring to the process of change and growth as a result of new learning. This change and growth can occur to the extent that previously-held truths are found to be inconsistent with the new findings. Be they theological concepts, doctrinal teachings, or dogmatic truths, when they are up for questioning, nothing can stop it. No amount of magisterial warnings will stop one from raising these questions. It is a matter of conscience. It is part and parcel of the discovery of Truth. Felix Wilfred puts it strongly: 'A critical reflection on the praxis of dialogue is bound to lead us to the conclusion that traditional theological frameworks can no more meaningfully integrate into themselves the new experiences, nor adequately respond to new questions and problems that continue to emerge' (Felix Wilfred, *op. cit.*, p. 208).

In the theological realm, questions concerning christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, the theology of religions, the kingdom of God, the concept of salvation, the understanding of mission are all significant issues. One need only look at the volumes and volumes of books written on issues such as the nature of salvation, the uniqueness of Christ, the possibility of other incarnations, the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Church, the debate on mission versus dialogue, to acknowledge that the issues are far from resolved (Paul Knitter explores many of these issues in detail in his two classics: *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Orbis Books, 1985, and *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global*

Responsability, Orbis Books, 1996). Even Vatican views on the importance of dialogue, cited in the previous section, are far from conclusive. To be sure, there are as many quotes found within the very same documents, such as *Dialogue and Proclamation* and *Redemptoris missio*, to suggest that ambiguity still resides in the Vatican about the notion of dialogue, evangelisation, proclamation, salvation, kingdom of God, etc. While acknowledging dialogue as an imperative and an integral aspect of evangelisation, the Vatican is quick to point out that proclamation is even more important. Or, while acknowledging the possibility of salvation in other religions, the constitutive role of Christ and the Church is also asserted (In *Jesus and the Others Names*, pp. 125-147, Knitter dialogues with Vatican views on many of these issues).

Dialogue is not such a clear-cut option. On the one hand the Church officially encourages it, yet on the other there are powerful currents which try to hold it back. It is because the 'price' for some is too high that they have reservations about its import. Felix Wilfred has a chapter in his book entitled 'Dialogue gasping for breath?' and in it suggests that dialogue 'is getting suffocated and constricted by the narrowness of the theological ambit in which it is moving' (Felix Wilfred, *op. cit.*, p. 228).

The Prospects of Dialogue

By now, we should be convinced that while dialogue seems to be a fundamental commitment of the Church, especially Vatican II, it is also an activity viewed with much trepidation and apprehension. It is as if, the Second Vatican Council were the momentous event where the Church graduated with a baccalaureate degree majoring in dialogue, but is now unsure whether dialogue is what she really wants to get into. Like any fresh graduate entering the work force, the Church will have to feel her way around before she finally gets comfortable with the vocation to dialogue. We have to give her time as we remind ourselves that she is in the time between eras, a transition period, a time between parenthesis. Her apprehensions and tears are not totally unfounded. Dialogue is a pretty risky business, and a path very few dare to tread.

Few as they are, they are the hope of the future. They have a qualitatively different form of Christian faith. Going by James Fowler's theory of faith development, only those who have reached at least a Stage Five Faith are those most capable of engaging in interreligious dialogue (James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Harper & Row, 1981, p. 186). It is a post-conventional form of faith where one has worked

through the 'either-or' mindset in order to be comfortable with a 'both-and' mentality. One becomes open to multidimensional, relational and organically interdependent forms of truth. Ambiguity and paradox are acceptable features in life as the Stage Five Faith is appropriately labelled 'Conjunctive or Paradoxical-Consolidative Faith'. Truth need no longer be singular, absolute or final. It can remain relative, tentative, pluralistic and open to Mystery. The Stage Five person is able to let go of previous securities in order to tread the unknown and the mysterious. S/he arrived at this stage partly as a result of the 'leaving-home' experience, leaving behind temporarily beliefs, practices, and traditions. S/he then is open to entering into new 'homes', to listen to new forms of beliefs, experience new forms of practices and invest in new forms of traditions. S/he will be enriched and transformed by this new learning, and go away with a broader perspective of God, religion, and life in general. The Stage Five person is the best hope for the future of dialogue. The present few who are engaging in dialogue are paving the way for others to follow. They are the prophets pointing the way to the future.

While Fowler's empirical research concludes that only a very small percentage of adults are currently at Stage Five Faith, process philosophy, which subscribes to an evolutionary process of the cosmos, predicts that more and more people will evolve to that stage with time. (This thesis has been advanced by philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Teilhard de Chardin, Aurobindo and contemporary scholar Ken Wilber. Quoted in *No Other Name?*, p. 7). That is to say, in time to come, Stage Five Faith will be common to humanity as interreligious dialogue will become common activity. With more and more people engaged in the praxis of dialogue, Christianity will then take on new forms. No longer will it live in isolation, for then it will be interacting healthily with the other religions of the world. No longer will it need to consider herself superior, as then it will acknowledge that it is one among many, albeit unique in its own way. No longer will it remain a Western Church with its forms and contents, for then it would have become a genuinely world Church (Karl Rahner's thesis quoted in *No Other Name?*, p. 20). Put another way, the Catholic Church would then become a truly catholic Church. That moment will be the new *Kairós* — a moment of true transformation, a moment of true maturity, a moment of true growth. Christianity would have come of age. At 21, having reached full adulthood, with dialogue as a way of life, she would have become truly a *New Way of Being Church*.

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RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS AND THE DEBT ISSUE

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to present the main ideas that have guided the SEDOS World Debt Working Group, the main insights we have come to, and the direction, with regard to the debt crisis, that we see as necessary not only for ourselves, but for all religious. We began, of course, with the conviction that the debt burden of many poor countries is an injustice of such serious proportions that to ignore it would be to abandon any claims to have made a preferential option for the poor. In fact, the debt crisis is a prime example of the poor being punished for the failures, the mistakes, and sometimes the wrongs, of others.

In spite of our limitations, our lack of expertise in economics, and our lack of confidence in our own abilities in this matter, we have learned that we (and I refer here to all religious, not just the members of the Debt Group) do have our own expertise, and that we do have something to bring to the debate on the debt issue. Our expertise is not necessarily in economics. More than anything else it derives from our commitment to and experience with the poor. Most of our congregations have made a preferential option for the poor. In fact, that is implicit in following Christ. That option means that when we look at issues such as the debt, we do so from the standpoint of the poor. That and, even more, *our experience with the poor* are our real resources. Many of us have lived for many years with the poor, and those of us who have not, normally have close contact with others who do. Perhaps more than any other group addressing the debt issue (or other economic issues) we have the capacity to look at these from the standpoint of the poor. This is what we have to bring to the debate.

I myself have spent all of my working life in Japan — perhaps not the ideal place to achieve the perspective of the poor. But throughout my time in Japan, I had a significant degree of involvement in establishing relationships between Church groups in Japan and others in the Third World. Most particularly, for more than ten years, I have had a relationship with a particular village in the northern Philippines. When I look at economic issues, I make a conscious effort to do so from the perspective of that village. I think that consciously or unconsciously, the majority of religious do something similar. We all

look at these matters from the perspective of the people whose lives have become one with our own. Perhaps the fact that there is a large representation of women among us, means that we are also in a position to promote awareness of the feminisation of poverty.

A. OUR BASIC APPROACH

I think it is fair to say that there have been two ideas that have guided us. The first idea is the one that I have already described, namely that the perspective we seek to take is the perspective of the poor. The second idea is also important. We are convinced that it is a mistake to simply treat the debt as a problem in its own right. Rather, it is an integral aspect of a complex world economic situation, and it should be seen as a window through which to look at the whole economy and bring to light its structures, its imbalances, and its biases.

Another way to look at this is to say that the debt crisis should be seen as a symptom of a more fundamental disease in the economy, rather than as a disease in itself. If a person is bleeding, it is important to stop the bleeding. But it is also important to know why the person is bleeding. If the person has an injury that will heal on its own if the bleeding is stopped, then that is all that needs to be done. But if the person has a disease that is causing the bleeding, then stopping the bleeding is only one of the things that needs to be done. The cause needs to be treated.

I think that there are three different kinds of possibilities, and we may use health and disease as an example to explain them. There may be times when it is enough to treat the disease, and the symptoms will clear up on their own. There may be other times when the self-healing powers of the body are enough to treat the disease, but the symptoms (such as bleeding) are dangerous in their own right, and need to be treated. But there will be many cases in which both the symptoms and the disease need to be treated. We in the Debt Group believe that the problem of the external debt of the poor countries is of this third kind: both the symptom and the disease need to be treated. The symptom, the debt itself, places a severe burden on poorer countries, diverts funds needed for social welfare and economic development, and puts creditors in a position to dictate the policies of the indebted countries, thereby over

riding their autonomy. Therefore the debt itself is a problem that needs to be solved. However, the debt crisis did not come about just as some kind of fluke of history. It has causes in economic practices and structures. And unless these are addressed, even if the debt is cancelled, it will only be a matter of time before a new debt crisis, or an equivalent situation, emerges.

Many analyses of the causes of the debt crisis, attribute the escalation of the debt to the so-called "oil-shocks" of the 1970's. I think that this is the most common explanation for it. Large amounts of petrodollars flowed into the banks at a time when the developed world was in recession. The banks did not have adequate avenues for investment of these funds in the developed world, and consequently sought the opportunity to make loans in the Third World. There is no doubt that this is a contributing factor to the debt crisis. Missionaries and religious from Third World countries have told us that they witnessed aggressive lending practices by banks at that time. However, on its own, it is not an adequate explanation for the debt crisis.

Normally, loans are meant to be invested, and to generate income with which they can be serviced and repaid. To know the real causes of the debt crisis one must ask why these loans did not generate such income.

We have tried to address these issues in our position paper. One reason we have given is the collapse of commodity prices at the end of the 1970's. The green revolution and an escalation of investments in agricultural development had led to a large increase in agricultural output, and this, coupled with recession, led to a collapse in commodity prices. Behind this historical incident (the collapse in commodity prices) is a structural one: in a market economy, primary produce has a weaker position than manufactured goods. When primary production increases, prices tend to decline. This weakness must be seen as one of the structural problems behind the world debt.

Another historical causal factor of the debt is the corruption of many Governments in the Third World in the 1970's (and since). Again, behind this historical phenomenon lie structural issues: the absence of an international insolvency procedure and the fact that creditors could lend to Governments, no matter how corrupt, with the confidence that debts would be passed on to subsequent Governments when the corrupt Government inevitably collapsed. Creditors have been protected from the kind of accountability that would exist if they were making loans to a private borrower who could go bankrupt as a result of mismanagement, bad judgment, or corruption.

In our position paper, we have noted such other causes

as the adoption of floating exchange rates, the application of variable interest rates, and misguided models of development that led to inappropriate attempts at industrialisation in the developing countries. One of our main conclusions, therefore, is that to respond seriously to the debt crisis, we must look way beyond the debt, and must undertake what can only be a long and ongoing process of analysis and of campaigning and advocacy both to appeal for an understanding of the economy from the perspective of the poor and to work for the changes, on various levels, that are needed to realize a more just global economy.

B. SUPPORT FOR THE JUBILEE 2000 CAMPAIGN

The SEDOS World Debt Working Group has opted to support and promote the Jubilee 2000 Campaign. I will not go into detail about this campaign, because Ann Pettifor will be speaking later. Put briefly, what the campaign seeks is a cancellation of the backlog of unpayable debt of the world's poorest countries by the year 2,000. The campaign calls for a transparent and independent procedure to carry this out, and calls on the leaders of the lending nations to "take effective steps to prevent such high levels of debt building up again".

As I said before, the debt crisis is both a symptom of a deeper problem and a problem in its own right. By calling for a cancellation of the debt and for effective steps to avoid a similar situation recurring, the Jubilee 2000 Campaign is calling for a resolution both to the immediate problem and to the causes of the problem. It does not, of course, promote specific structural changes. In a petition of this nature, I think it is appropriate not to.

I would like to dwell for a moment on the idea of cancellation: what is it likely to achieve.

Will cancellation of the debt bring relief to the poor?

Some may ask: How can we be sure that money released by the cancellation of the debt will actually reach the needy? I think it is important that we not be naïve about how much money is actually going to be released by a cancellation of the debt. Remember that the request is for a cancellation of the backlog of unpayable debt, not of the total debt. It would not necessarily bring an immediate influx of wealth. If my net worth is -\$1,000 dollars and I get some debts cancelled, so that my net worth becomes -\$100 dollars, I still do not have a lot of money to throw around.

The write-off of \$900 dollars, however, would make an important difference. If I owe \$1,000 and there is no way in the world that I am going to be able to pay more

than \$100, then I am permanently at the mercy of my creditors. Cancellation of the \$900 debt that I cannot pay may not immediately put money in my pocket. But it will put me back in control of my own life. I think that this is the really important thing in debt cancellation: the restoration of autonomy to the poorer countries.

Once autonomy is restored, then the country should have the potential to work for its own development, and here indeed is the risk of the corruption emerging that was a contributing factor to the debt crisis in the first place. This, I think is why the Jubilee 2000 Campaign calls for debt relief under an independent, transparent procedure. There could and should be measures taken to see that the benefits that would accrue from debt cancellation benefit the whole country. But it should not be creditors who determine what these procedures are. Nor should it be Governments of developed countries that have a vested interest in seeing that they have access to the material resources of the debtor countries. It should, indeed, be independent and transparent.

Will cancelling the debt let corrupt governments off the hook?

Some may argue that cancelling the debt will simply let corrupt governments off the hook. The reality is that they are already off the hook. It is not the Marcoses and the Mobutus that the creditors are going after to get their debts serviced. They are not beating down the doors of the Swiss Banks. It is the people of the country who have been left impoverished by these governments who are being asked to pay. This is one of the reasons that we think a cancellation of certain portions of the debt is, in fact, morally obligatory — although we would not object to the bill being sent to those who are really accountable for the debts.

If the debt is cancelled, will banks become unwilling to lend?

Some may argue that cancelling the debt will make it unlikely that banks will be willing to loan to these countries again. There are two responses to this. Firstly, the reality is that these countries already cannot get loans from commercial bankers. As I have already stressed, we are talking about the cancellation of *unpayable* debt. Much of the debt of the Third World is unpayable — in other words, it can never be, and will never be, repaid. This very fact is enough to make commercial creditors shy away. It is now the multilateral creditors and to some extent bilateral creditors who are lending to these poorest countries. Cancellation of the debt will not do any damage to the capacity of these countries to borrow, that has not al-

ready been done by the very *unpayability* of the debt.

Secondly, precedents indicate that debt cancellation does not make creditors unwilling to make future loans. Germany had its debt cancelled in 1953, but one does not hear today of Germany having difficulty borrowing money. The fact is that creditors need to lend as much as borrowers need to borrow, and they will lend if they see a reasonable possibility of return, and this depends on the prospects for the future, not on whether or not there has been debt cancellation in the past.

The procedure for determining what is unpayable debt, and the establishment of an independent transparent procedure — these are matters of logistics and must be worked out fairly and transparently. But the essential goal of the Jubilee 2000 Campaign is one that we feel should be supported.

We have another reason for supporting the Jubilee 2000 Campaign, apart from our support for its expressed goals. We are convinced that the single most important thing for the resolution of the debt crisis is political will. People must be made aware of the debt crisis, they must take a position on it, and governments must be made aware of the position people are taking. We see the Jubilee 2000 Campaign as a vehicle for promoting that political will. We have noted too, that other NGOs, even when they might quibble about the exact formulation of the Jubilee 2000 Campaign's goals, are well aware that a successful Jubilee 2000 Campaign will help all activities toward a resolution of the debt crisis, because it will represent a powerful voice of the people.

C. WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As I have already noted, we are convinced that just a cancellation is not enough. There are important structural and procedural changes that need to be made if there is to be a real change. Based on an overview of the causes of the debt crisis, it is not difficult to say, in a general way, what the needed changes are: a resolution to adjust the disparity between primary and manufactured products in the market, clear structures of accountability for creditors, a priority for governments to respond first to the real human needs of their people, and meeting their debt obligations second, an independent and transparent system of resolving problems in capital flow, etc. These things are easy to say. But how are they to be achieved? And what role might there be for religious in achieving them?

The fact is that these suggestions do not constitute a recipe for change. At best they give certain directions. I do not believe that we should think in terms of developing some idealised image of society and trying to

realize it. I do not think that we are capable, nor do I think that such approaches work. Rather, I think that we need to work within the system, in collaboration with others, in order to achieve change in an incremental and evolutionary way. By this I do not necessarily mean "slow change". Quite the contrary, I think that changes need to be made quite rapidly. But they must be changes that, as much as possible, build on and work through the structures that already exist.

What is the role of Catholic religious in this? As I noted before, we religious have an enormous resource. That is our close relationship with the poor of the world, our years shared with them and the fact that our faith has often motivated us to share in their lives as much as possible. This is an enormous resource. We are probably in a better situation than any other large group in the world, to see that the voice of the poor is heard, and that the viewpoint of the poor comes into play, in the search for a solution to the debt crisis and the other structural problems we have referred to.

Unfortunately, I do not think that we have become expert at bringing this experience to bear where it is needed. We talk too much to each other and to the converted. We get too much of a sense of achievement from developing documents and statements that are very meaningful to us, but lose their impact when read by outsiders. And I think that we feel too inexperienced to face skilled economists and politicians. That is one reason why I think it is important that we recognize that we have our own expertise and that we have an important voice. So we need to make that voice heard in all the places that it needs to be heard.

There are many actors in this drama of the debt crisis: Governments, the Bretton-Woods institutions (the World Bank, the IMF, the development banks; they may be considered to include the World Trade Organisation), and the United Nations, NGOs (non-governmental organisations). There are also the communications media, the general public; at times such other institutions as the legal systems in the countries in which we work can be important. There are also people such as scholars and experts from whom we can learn much but to whom we can also bring our own particular perspective.

With regard to NGOs, there is such an enormous variety of these that it is probably not appropriate even to lump them together as one group. Some work so closely with governments that they have a semi-official status. They include religious groups like ourselves, lobbying groups, groups involved in social and political projects and campaigns; and they include grassroots groups. Many of these NGOs have developed networks and are in fact working for change, lobbying governments, the World

Bank, the IMF, etc. These networks have established relations with governments and international institutions and they are a powerful force for change. Many of us know from experience that there is often a large gap between the grassroots NGOs in the developing world and the NGOs in the developed world. The grassroots groups often see the NGOs of the developed world simply as "rich kids doing their own thing". They may have a point, but this is something that weakens a coalition that could be a powerful force for change in the world. We religious may be in a position to bridge this gap.

As has been said, the SEDOS World Debt Working Group began with a SEDOS symposium. One of the speakers at that symposium was Dominick Coyle, an editor and writer for the *Financial Times*. I would like to refer back to some of the things he said at the end of his talk, some of the concrete suggestions that he made. The last four or five minutes of his talk was an urge that we "raise our profile". He recommended that we address ourselves to governments and government agencies, to the major donor countries, and multilateral agencies, that we seek advisory consultative status with these, and bring before them our views on what is happening and what is necessary. He urged that we train ourselves more in the relevant disciplines, so that we can address these institutions with greater professionalism. And he urged that we rely more on the expertise of lay professionals.

Here I think is an important point. I have said that we are experts. I must also say that our expertise on its own is not enough. We need to develop our own expertise, but we also need to be able to work and collaborate with others, bringing our knowledge and insights to the discussion, and listening to the knowledge and insights of others. Dominick Coyle said one other thing that I think was important, and he said that it was the key to his whole address. He said, "you are not alone in wanting change, in your concern for the poor, in your worries about the policies of the major aid and loan agencies" ("The World Debt", SEDOS Seminar, Rome, 11 October 1994, in SEDOS Bulletin, 1994, pp. 313-319).

In the World Debt Working Group, we have focussed on the debt as it relates to the poor and consequently on the relationship between the debt and the conditionality for debt relief such as structural adjustment programmes, market liberalisation, etc. We remain convinced that an important role for ourselves is to maintain a stance that is at the same time both prophetic and collaborative in relation to the actors that I have mentioned above. This role, in addition to promoting the Jubilee 2000 Campaign, will be the focus of the Working Group from now on.

* * * * *

NOS CONGREGATIONS EN FACE DE LA DETTE MONDIALE

Monique Fabre, RSCJ

Conférence donnée pour SEDOS à Rome, le 17 février 1998.

Suite au Séminaire du SEDOS du 11 octobre 1994 sur "la Dette internationale et la réponse de l'Eglise", un groupe de recherches de nos diverses Congrégations s'est constitué en janvier 1995. Les deux sous-groupes francophone et anglophone avaient pour but :

a - comprendre les systèmes économiques de nos jours, les rôles du FMI, de la Banque Mondiale, des banques de développement, des gouvernements dans le problème de la Dette mondiale.

b - entamer un processus de conscientisation de nos Congrégations sur ce problème.

c - ouvrir de petites pistes, entreprendre de petites actions à notre portée, non pour résoudre le problème, mais pour faire ce qui est en notre pouvoir.

Comment avons-nous travaillé ?

- personnellement et dans les groupes respectifs à un rythme mensuel en général, avec des documents, livres, exposés.

- avec l'aide de personnes extérieures, d'experts ponctuels ou qui participaient régulièrement au groupe, tel un ancien consultant de la Banque Mondiale.

- avec quelques rencontres communes des 2 groupes linguistiques pour partager l'état de nos recherches.

Nous avons ensemble réalisé une démarche auprès de personnalités françaises participant à la rencontre du G7 à Lyon en juin 1995.

Même en travaillant séparément nous sommes arrivés à des conclusions similaires, et nous souhaitons vous partager quelques unes de nos convictions et le point où nous sommes aujourd'hui.

A. LA CRISE DE LA DETTE : UNE FENÊTRE SUR L'ECONOMIE GLOBALE ?

C'est une erreur de traiter la dette comme un problème en soi. La crise de la dette est le symptôme d'un malaise plus fondamental dans l'économie.. Il faut traiter à la fois le symptôme et le mal qui en est la cause. Le symptôme, la dette elle-même, pèse lourdement sur les pays les plus pauvres. Mais il a des causes dans les pratiques et les structures économiques. Si on n'en tient pas compte, même si la dette est effacée,

au bout d'un certain temps, une nouvelle crise surgira avec des situations équivalentes.

On attribue généralement le point de départ de la dette au choc pétrolier des années 70 : les pétrodollars ont afflué dans les banques à un moment où le monde développé était en récession. Les pays en voie de développement ont constitué alors des débouchés pour ces fonds et les organismes de crédit ont cherché, parfois de façon agressive, à leur faire des prêts.

Toutefois, ceci n'explique pas la crise de la dette des années 80 et suivantes, car les prêts sont normalement investis pour produire des revenus qui permettent le remboursement de la dette. Parmi les causes réelles de la crise de la dette, nous avons relevé :

* la chute des prix des produits de base à la fin des années 70 due à la récession dans le monde développé et à l'augmentation de la production des produits agricoles. Cette instabilité des prix de produits de base est un problème structurel de l'économie de marché.

* la corruption de beaucoup de gouvernements dans les pays en développement, avec en arrière plan l'absence d'une procédure internationale en cas d'insolvabilité et le fait que les créiteurs pouvaient prêter aux gouvernements, même corrompus, avec l'assurance que les dettes passeraient aux gouvernements suivants. Ces créiteurs ont fait des prêts irresponsables.

* l'adoption de taux de change fluctuants qui ont entraîné pour les pays dont la monnaie est faible une augmentation du service de la dette qui s'effectue généralement en dollars américains,

* l'application de taux d'intérêt variables qui ont augmenté effectivement de 7% à 19,5%.

* des modèles de développement qui ont conduit à des tentatives d'industrialisation inadaptée aux pays en développement.

Une de nos principales conclusions est que, pour répondre sérieusement à la crise de la dette, nous devons regarder au-delà de la dette. Nous devons entreprendre un processus long et continu d'analyse et de campagne afin que peu à peu, on regarde

l'économie du point de vue des pauvres et qu'on travaille à des changements à différents niveaux afin de réaliser une économie globale plus juste.

B. VERS DES INITIATIVES AU NIVEAU DE LA MICROECONOMIE

Nous sommes persuadés qu'il faut agir au niveau local, au niveau de la microéconomie et valoriser ce qu'on peut appeler des *initiatives alternatives* de la "force historique des pauvres", selon Gabriel Marc du Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD). C'est-à-dire des alternatives au système financier dominant.

Parmi les causes de l'origine de la dette, très schématiquement on peut dire ceci : il y a eu des investisseurs qui ont prêté de l'argent à des débiteurs en passant par des intermédiaires. Il n'y avait pas de connexions matérielles et de relations directes entre les deux, d'où un manque de responsabilité dans la gestion des fonds soit de la part du prêteur, soit de la part de l'emprunteur. Par contre l'intermédiaire s'enrichit grâce aux fluctuations des taux d'intérêt et aux variations des taux de change des monnaies. A partir de là, nous avons pris conscience qu'il faut créer un système où celui qui prête et celui qui emprunte se connaissent et soient engagés tous les deux dans les projets pour lequel le prêt est nécessaire ; ces projets doivent être réalisables et répondre aux besoins locaux réels. Cela ne peut se faire qu'à l'échelle de la microéconomie.

Localement, nous pouvons promouvoir des associations d'entraide à petite échelle afin que le capital investi reste sous le contrôle des prêteurs et des emprunteurs et non des usurpateurs du marché bancaire économique. Sinon, les emprunteurs dépendent de ces derniers.

Il existe déjà de ces microréalizations qui sont *élaborées, décidées, assumées, réalisées* par les gens sur place. L'expérience montre que dans de telles conditions, le remboursement des dettes peut atteindre 80 à 90 %. On favorise ainsi le sens de la responsabilité et de l'honnêteté. Et on évite l'endettement ultérieur.

Quelques exemples : dans le Sud de l'Inde, une vingtaine d'associations de femmes ont été créées dans les villages,

- * organisant des activités économiques communes (tissage, élevage de vaches, production à partir des feuilles de bananes),

- * créant une banque d'épargne et de crédit à partir

des contributions des associées,

- *s'impliquant dans les services locaux : magasins de distribution des rations alimentaires (la corruption a été éliminée), services publics de transport, de santé, de développement rural.

Ces associations ont obtenu un statut consultatif pour la planification du développement rural ainsi que des services et des coopératives dans une zone donnée. La fédération des associations est même arrivée à proposer des candidates aux élections rurales. Elles sont devenues une force de changement dans le pays. Pourquoi ? parce qu'on a rendu ces femmes aptes à mettre en oeuvre leur potentiel, leur capacité d'action et de production. Elles ont accès aux ressources, contrôlent le processus de production et ont le droit de disposer de leurs produits.

Je pourrais citer l'histoire des caisses populaires dans l'ex-Zaïre qui montre qu'en 20 ans, on est arrivé :

- à garder de l'argent en réserve
- à ne pas le dépenser n'importe comment
- à assurer un service de dépôts et de gestion suivie et honnête.

Les membres-adhérents ont eu accès à des prêts pour la construction sur la recommandation de deux cautionneurs, et ils ont pu bénéficier de services d'achat de matériels dont ils avaient besoin.

Dans le cadre de la FAO, des fonds de crédit rural sont allés vers des groupes de familles qui solidairement s'engagent au remboursement selon un taux prévu et modéré.

C. DES INVESTISSEMENTS ALTERNATIFS

Quand nous ne sommes pas sur place pour favoriser ce type d'entraide par associations, coopératives, voici une autre possibilité pour nos Congrégations : si nous avons des fonds, nous pouvons les investir d'une manière utile et juste et mettre notre capital à la disposition d'organismes qui ont une politique d'investissements éthiques, qui s'engagent à investir avec un sens de la responsabilité sociale. Investir avec le sens de la responsabilité sociale, c'est promouvoir des valeurs telles que le bien commun, la justice, la solidarité, la confiance réciproque, la vérité et la transparence. Je nomme deux organismes, non pour leur faire de la publicité, mais comme exemples :

- la SCOD (EDCS) ou Société Coopérative Oecuménique de développement dont on nous a parlé récemment à la rencontre organisée par la Commis-

sion JPIC.

- la CBIS (Services d'investissements des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes aux USA).

Ces organisations octroient des prêts à intérêt modéré à des personnes ou groupes marginalisés, spécialement des pays en développement, qui se voient refuser de tels prêts par les établissements financiers habituels. Les fonds de ces organismes viennent généralement des Congrégations, des Eglises, etc...

Je cite aussi la Banque Grameen en Belgique, Banque des pauvres, qui accorde des microcrédits aux déshérités, aux *intouchables bancaires*. Son fondateur la qualifie de *banque différente* : " nous avons regardé comment fonctionnaient les banques et nous avons fait le contraire."

D. POURQUOI SOUTENIR LA CAMPAGNE DU JUBILÉ 2000 ?

Nos groupes de travail du Sedos ont choisi de soutenir et promouvoir la Campagne du JUBILÉ 2000 lancée en Grande Bretagne et qui est devenue une Campagne internationale pour alléger la dette.

Un des aspects de cette Campagne est la Pétition du Jubilé 2000 qui demande " *une unique annulation, pour l'an 2000, des arriérés de la dette non remboursable, due par les pays les plus pauvres du monde, selon une procédure indépendante, transparente* ".

La Campagne pousse aussi à reconnaître la responsabilité de tous, créditeurs et débiteurs, et appelle les leaders des pays créditeurs à faire les pas nécessaires pour prévenir le retour de niveaux d'endettement aussi élevés.

La Campagne agit donc sur le problème de la dette et sur ses causes.

Nous sentons que toutes nos Congrégations religieuses devraient soutenir la Pétition parce que :

- une annulation de la dette libérerait beaucoup de pays pauvres du contrôle excessif des créditeurs qui imposent des conditions et des programmes d'ajustement structurel au détriment des pauvres.

- nos Congrégations sont une puissance par leur nombre et leur internationalité et elles peuvent avoir une influence, unies avec d'autres groupes religieux, des ONG et d'autres organismes qui cherchent des solutions au problème.

- participer à la Pétition du jubilé 2000, c'est se faire **les défenseurs des sans voix** : en collectant des signatures dans tous les lieux où nous sommes et où nous travaillons, nous devenons une voix pour ceux qui ne peuvent pas faire entendre la leur.

Il y a peut-être une autre manière de collaborer à

cette Campagne : nous savons combien il est important qu'une remise ou un allègement de la dette soit au bénéfice de tout le pays et spécialement des plus pauvres. L'allègement de la dette, dans un premier temps n'apportera pas de fonds aux pays débiteurs, mais elle restaurera leur autonomie et leur permettra de prendre en mains leur propre développement. Les gouvernements devraient s'engager à améliorer les conditions de vie et favoriser le développement de leurs populations. Nous soulignons les possibilités que nous donne encore notre internationalité : nous pouvons inviter les ONG qui sont sur place, les églises locales, des groupes de pression à agir sur leurs gouvernements afin que la réduction de la dette serve vraiment les plus pauvres et améliore leurs conditions de vie, de santé, d'éducation, etc... Nos communautés peuvent susciter les initiatives des associations locales afin qu'elles prêtent leurs voix à ceux qui n'en ont pas, et deviennent ainsi des partenaires dans ce processus de conscientisation.

Nos réseaux internes de Justice et Paix peuvent faciliter cette collaboration.

E. CONCLUSION

J'aimerais dire un mot sur *notre présence dans les pays en développement* et fortement atteints par la dette externe.

Parler d'inculturation de nos Congrégations est une expression maladroite et banale. Ce que nous voulons dire, c'est que la présence de nos communautés et d'oeuvres dans les pays les plus touchés par la crise de la dette doit être inculturée et significative pour les gens qui nous entourent.

Significative dans notre style de vie, dans nos habitations, dans les moyens que nous utilisons, qui doivent être adaptés à la population environnante.

En vivant de ce que nous gagnons, en partageant matériellement et spirituellement dans nos communautés, nous témoignons de ce qu'est une vie digne dans un contexte modeste.

Ce témoignage est une forme d'éducation pour les gens au milieu desquels nous vivons : souvent ils ont pris l'habitude de recevoir des autres, de dépendre, ce qui est déshumanisant. Il faut apprendre à exploiter les ressources locales, à utiliser ce qu'on a sur place. Sans exclure des aides ponctuelles.

L'éducation et la formation sont le fondement de tout développement humain, social et économique et sont bien dans la mission de nos Congrégations qui ont fait une option préférentielle pour les pauvres.

BY GIVING SMALL LOANS TO WOMEN, A BANGLADESHI BANKER IS FIGHTING POVERTY AND CREATING A REVOLUTION IN THE BANKING WORLD

DAWN MacKEEN

Laily Begum remembers what it was like to live like an animal — to spend her nights sleeping in a cow shed and her days begging on the streets of Patira, Bangladesh, eating the scraps of food people handed her. “Nobody helped me before”, she says now, looking back. Begum, a 35-year-old mother of three, remembers what it was like to be indescribably poor. But in Bangladesh, where more than 50 million people live below the poverty line, Begum was just one of many.

The only way out of poverty, Begum thought, was to get enough money to buy a cow so she could sell its milk.

Needless to say, she could not get a loan from a traditional bank because she had nothing to offer as collateral and only a meager income from doing housework. It was a stranger from Dhaka who finally helped her — a man named Muhammad Yunis, who has an unprecedented vision for changing the lives of poor women all over the world.

After hearing about Grameen Bank, which lends money to the poor and was founded by Yunis, Begum took out a loan for 5,500 taka (\$119) and bought her cow. Only seven years and as many loans later, Begum has transformed her life. She now moves about her own two-roomed home — made of mud, reinforced sticks and a tin roof — with a mobile phone pressed to her ear. The phone is the result of her latest loan, which she has turned into a profitable business of selling phone calls to other people in her village of 10,000.

“People now come to me for help”, Begum says through a translator on an early Friday morning phone interview. “I’m self-sufficient and I can feed myself and my family, and now other people look at me and they treat me with respect”.

Mention the name Muhammad Yunis to Begum and she pauses for a long time. “He is the one who has made it possible for us to have phones, for us to have

cows, for us to change our lives”, she says finally. “I have seen him occasionally when he comes to our village”.

The truth is, Yunis probably does not know who Begum is or exactly how her life has changed over the last seven years. She is just one of two million women whose lives have been altered since Yunis founded the Grameen Bank 15 years ago.

The bank is a place where Bangladesh’s poorest come and are not turned away, for having little or no money is a criteria to become a borrower at Grameen, which means “village” in Bangla. “The fact that somebody is a human being is good enough an introduction for us”, Yunis says, and adds fervently that credit should be a human right, not a privilege.

Grameen started as an idea when Yunis left the United States for his native Bangladesh after it became an independent country in 1971. He taught economics at Chittagong University. Yunis had started to wonder if the theories of economics he was teaching were just that — mere theories, which work only in diagrams on a blackboard — when, as he left the classroom each day, he could see people struggling to survive. Yunis started travelling from village to village to learn about real economics.

“One woman that I met was making bamboo stools, and she was making only twopence a day”, he says. “And I couldn’t believe that anybody could make such a beautiful product and earn so little”. The woman explained that she did not have enough money to buy the bamboo outright, so she had to go through a trader who made her sell the final product back to him for a price that he decided. “And I realized what had happened: She had become a bonded labourer to the trader”.

The first loans Yunis ever made were out of his own pocket — \$27 a piece to 42 people. He had become convinced that people were poor not just be-

cause they had no financial resources but also because they had no social currency. Yunis, then in his 30's, made it his life's work to change both the plight and the perception of the poor. "When you see that you can touch the life of one person and it happens right in front of your own eyes, it's a very intoxicating experience", he says. "What excites me is the possibility that this can happen to millions and billions of people around the world".

Yunis convinced the Bangladeshi Government to allow him to start a bank, which has since grown to become the country's largest rural credit institution, operating in almost 40,000 villages across Bangladesh. Since its founding, the bank has loaned out almost \$2 million to a mostly female clientele (94 per cent of the bank's total borrowers). The 57-year-old Yunis targets women because he believes they are the key to improving the lives of children. They tend to funnel more money, he says, back into the family than men do, and tend to invest in tomorrow while men spend their money as soon as they get it.

Yunis, himself a father of two, believes that his work at Grameen is more about people than dollars and cents. It is about helping the poor release themselves from poverty's grip; it is about remedying the problem, not donating money in the name of charity and then walking away. "Charity doesn't help poor people, it takes away their dignity; it takes away their initiative", Yunis says. "So I think when a person has a business kind of arrangement, a partnership, he or she feels equal. Charity helps remove concern about the poor because people feel that they have done their duty just by throwing a few crumbs at them". Yunis believes he is promoting more of a philosophy of living than an economic model. His 16 somewhat controversial "commandments" for Grameen borrowers are embodiments of that philosophy — thou shalt grow vegetables all year-round, thou shalt exercise, thou shalt not exchange dowries, thou shalt keep thy families small. "Why does a family need so many children? To help you in your old age?" Yunis asks. "Have less children and build them up so they become economically sound people. It's better to go for quality than quantity". By promoting his philosophy and loaning small amounts of money — averaging the equivalent of \$100 at a time — to women wanting to start or expand a business, Yunis has started a revolution in the banking world. That revolution is called "microcredit", a principle of promoting money-lending at commercial interest rates to the world's poorest. Hundreds of institutions from Bolivia to Kenya

have now modelled themselves on the principle of microcredit. Moreover, what Yunis discovered — and what the rest of the world is finding out — is that the poor are not financial risks: 98 per cent of Grameen's borrowers repay their loans.

"What started out as a social and geo movement is now moving into the mainstream of the private sector", says Joyita Mukherjee, microfinance specialist at the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest at the World Bank. "Commercial banks are now looking at these individuals as a market niche. And that's good". The microcredit movement has grown so much that last year there was a Microcredit Summit in Washington, D.C., that kicked off a global campaign to try to bring credit to the poorest people, with a goal of reaching 100 million lives by the year 2,005. The summit brought together more than 2,900 participants, from Hillary Rodham Clinton to the president of the Women's Environment and Development Organization, all in the name of spreading Yunis' microcredit principle.

Mukherjee observes that the movement is not just changing women's economic status — it is also changing their traditional social status as well. "You see a big difference in the lives of these women and what they are able to do. You can take a view and say this is only financial services but it actually affects more than just the economic activity. It's also about empowerment and changing women's roles in society".

Since Begum took out her loan and became an important *entrepreneur* in her village, she has seen other women begin to walk around and leave their traditional places — a significant shift in rural Bangladesh, where women are expected to stay literally inside their homes. And within her own family, the roles have definitely changed: She is the breadwinner and outearns her husband by 30 to 40 per cent.

This Bangladeshi woman now not only leaves her hut everyday but also, through a mobile phone and a cow, has made herself a place in the world — all, she says, because of that man she sees visiting her village every once in a while.

Ref.: *SALONMAGAZINE*, February 1998.

(Grameen Bank

<http://www.citechco.net/grameen/bank/micro/>)

BELIEVE AS JESUS DID: THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE KINGDOM

José María Vigil

Nicaraguan theologian Fr José María Vigil is a prolific writer. The following article is a sintesis of the fundamental elements of Latinamerican spirituality which he sees as centred on Believing as Jesus did.

In recent years the Christians of the subcontinent (South America) have lived a very special spiritual experience, which has strongly influenced our historic way of life and has given us our own spirituality that has become our gift to the world. And all great historic movements, synthesis of ideas, values and meaning come from a spiritual experience based on the profound, like one's own well in which thirst is quenched.

There are many spiritualities in Latin America, ranging from pre-Second Vatican Council to the New Age and including the Kikos, Opus Dei and the charismatics ... and all kinds of fundamentalists. But all of these, although they have spread here, were born elsewhere outside of Latin America. And there are even more than those that have arrived here. But there is also a genuine Latin American spirituality, which was born and grew here, strengthened by the fertile soil, watered with the blood of martyrs, that has been offered to the world with all of our charisma, charm and peculiar gifts that the Spirit has given us "for common use" (1 Cor 12:7). This is what will be addressed here.

Latin American Spirituality is characterized by placing at the centre the historic figure of Jesus, the true Jesus of Nazareth, and believing in him and no other abstraction — Christ Messiah, Son of the Living God, the Word Made Flesh and Blood. Few spiritualities have placed the following of Jesus, his cause and following throughout history, at the centre, as we have.

"Believing today in our world as Jesus believed in the world of Pax Romana": this means being Christian, a follower of Jesus. And, as such, because it means believing in him we have to act according to the same Spirit, with the "spirituality of the Kingdom". This is what our Latin American Spirituality has tried to do.

I have chosen this title because it expresses well the central issue, the fundamental, which can be systematically broken down in different theological elements. The most emblematic and encompassing symbols are found in faith in Jesus and his passion for the Kingdom.

In these few pages, based primarily on theologi-

cal categories, I propose questions and offer answers on the fundamental elements of our Latin American Spirituality, the essential elements that make it what it is and without which it would not exist. During times like the present, of revision, insecurity and even superficial repentance, it is good to look for the essential principles, those that hold up the building, without which a genuine Latin American Spirituality would not be sustained.

In this perspective the question we need to ask is: What are the fundamental elements of our spirituality that translate today in our way of believing in Jesus?

1. An historic-eschatological structure of the religious

This refers to the structure of religion itself, which, as is well-known, can adopt different concrete forms. In many religions the fundamental is lived according to a moral, such as complying with a divine external will through which salvation is gained. In other cases, religion is fundamentally the acceptance (intellectual and/or experiential) of a revealed truth. In other cases, the exchange between God/child is the ceremony and the offering of goods, in a kind of ontological-culturalist religion. None of these generic forms — common in the universe of religions — correspond to the belief in Jesus, although they do exist in many of the religions that say they are Christian.

To believe in Jesus implies having an historic vision of reality. Jesus had a dynamic concept of time, historic, lineal, not cyclical or closed within itself, but open, lineal, with an *alpha* and *omega*, with a perception of God walking before us and opening the future for us to build history.

Today we clearly see — scientifically speaking with Biblical texts in hand — the historic-eschatological character of Jesus' message (as opposed to other classical interpretations), which does not allow one to confuse its following — Christianity — with a moral, a ceremony, a doctrine or a simple juridical membership to a determined religious institution. Jesus' "religion" is a religion with an ethical-prophetic char-

acter built on an historical-eschatological structure, not an ontological-culturalist religiosity built on the classic models of religion (God above, human beings below).

The eschatological here alludes to relations between eschatology and history, not juxtaposed or non-contiguous relations, but of interpenetration and continuity. Eschatology imbues history allowing it to transcend history, the only form within our reach to be and do eschatology.

“Believe like Jesus” means conceiving reality like history, like a free choice for human beings, fomenting and generating utopia. From any other perspective and from any other reality one can be religious, but one cannot “believe like Jesus”. And without this, Latin American Spirituality could not live.

2. *God as the God of the Kingdom*

Many people believe in God, but there are fewer people who believe in the God of Jesus, or there are fewer people who believe in God like “Jesus believed in God”. He did not believe in God removed from history or God as something in itself, a God that is separated from us. Jesus believed in a God that has been talked about as a dual reality: God and Kingdom. God of the Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. A God without a Kingdom (unfortunately common among Christians) has nothing to do with Jesus’ faith (or Latin American Spirituality).

If a religious life experience or a text (even if it is an ecclesial document) talks about God without talking about the Kingdom it does not reflect Jesus’ spirituality (or Latin American Spirituality).

Jesus’ God is always a God of a will, a project, a utopia: God “dreams” of a different, new, renewed, dignified world of human beings and God. And this project, this utopia is called — in the words that Jesus himself used — *malkuta Yahve*, Kingdom of God.

This Kingdom was the project, dream and utopia of Jesus: the Reason why he lived, what he preached about, what he dreamed, why he took risks, why he was persecuted, arrested, tortured and executed. Jesus was, in effect, a fighter, a “militant”, a person with a Cause. This is what he believed. A Christianity with the Kingdom as its utopia, a cause for which we live and die, a Christianity that believes that utopias — or history — have come to an end, has little to do with Jesus. He believed in a very different way.

This Kingdom of God was the centre of Jesus’ life and preaching. It was his “fundamental option” using a term from modern-day anthropology; his “absolute” in more systematic terms. He knew that “only

the Kingdom is absolute (and that) everything else is relative”. The Kingdom of God (God of the Kingdom) was the uniting characteristic of Jesus’ religious experience, his dreams, his message and his preaching. This is one of the fundamental features of Jesus’ faith, which is why it is troubling to think of a Christianity (and Latin American Spirituality) that consciously or unconsciously proposes something other than the Kingdom as the centre of Christianity.

3. *Mutual implications between transcendence and immanence*

A determined type of relationship between eschatology and history also means a particular relation between transcendence and immanence. For Jesus there are not two histories, two realities, but only one. Transcendence and immanence are dimensions of the one global reality. Salvation is in history and in its process of Liberation towards eschatological fullness.

While the Kingdom is not part of this world (it has its origin in God: “My kingdom is not of this world”, Jn 18:36), it is among us to show us its liberating processes (“But if I cast out the devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you” Mt 12:28) at different levels and in different fields. All of the liberation that we experience shows the action of the anticipated eschatological salvation, fomenting the reality that will remain fully transfigured in eschatology. And this is what allows us, as it did Jesus, to contemplate history, its processes and its problems.

All dualism between transcendence and immanence, between what is above and what is below, between this world and the other world, between the divine and mundane, do not come from Jesus’ faith and cannot be identified with Latin American Spirituality.

4. *Practical realism*

A passion for reality, — always to begin with reality, to study and understand it adequately, and to return to it after a period of reflection with the purpose of transforming it to bring it closer to the demands of the Kingdom’s utopia, — is not only a methodological-pedagogical characteristic or a psychological talent of Latin Americans, but it comes also from the Spirit, a genuinely Latin America spiritual experience.

This realism includes a will to know and better understand reality, to analyse it and discover its historic and structural causes, to discern mechanisms and strategies to love more efficiently because our love wants to be intelligence and effective. Jesus, who did

ries later, did possess the same concern to denounce the many dark mechanisms in reality and to measure our hearts with love (Mt 25). Jesus was a profound realist: he was not fooled by words that were not accompanied by actions, even when the words were in prayer (Mt 7:21). Latin American Spirituality is the same.

5. *Mercy*

Jesus was guided by a passion, by a fundamental mercy that burned in his heart. His support was not found in theoretical doctrine or sociological analysis, but in a deep-seated feeling for so much pain and suffering, which is a sign of the absence of God.

Latin American Spirituality made “ethical indignation” (or the passion for dignity, to say it in a positive manner) a central experience of vital mercy, a “fundamental option”. At the heart of all profound human experiences there is a passion for dignity and values and an ethical reaction to a reality that is contradictory. In the suffering in the world there are dimensions that compromise the absolute values whose integration is necessary to us to feel truly human. This experience lets us see the most sensitive part of existence, which moves us and makes us react.

The Gospels offer abundant witness to Jesus’ mercy, his deep-seated compassion from contemplating reality, which made him shake with an ethical indignation because of injustice and exult in being a witness for the liberation of the oppressed. This “deep-seated mercy” that leads to an uncontrollable force forms part of believing like Jesus, and of Latin American Spirituality.

6. *Option for the poor*

Jesus perceived contradictory interests on the part of the diverse groups in society who are actors beyond their mere selves. Jesus talked about diverse “plurals”: the poor, the rich, the teachers of law, the Pharisees and Jesus took a stand in this conflict of interests. He tried to read them from the point of view of the “Justice of the Kingdom” and was in solidarity with the poor — the economically poor, women, children, the marginalized, the leper, the sinner. He felt part of them and worked in favour of them, and the enemies of the poor felt that he was not on their side.

Jesus, despite being the presence of love itself among us, was not neutral. He was always on the side of the poor, the victims of injustice. And he called on all, including the powerful and those who pretended to be neutral for religious reasons, to convert and develop an effective solidarity with the poor.

God wanted to realize his project, the Kingdom;

he wanted to introduce everything to the will of God. And this is the Good News for the poor that Jesus enthusiastically dedicated himself to carrying out: “Blessed are the poor and poor in Spirit for they will inherit the Kingdom of God” (Mt 5:3).

Believing like Jesus means that we have to adopt this same position and use our lives to carry out deeds that proclaim the Good News.

7. *New ecclesiology*

The return to Jesus, his rediscovery, has also led us to rediscover ecclesiology. The Second Vatican Council marked a fundamental ecclesiological shift. If Jesus had as his absolute the Kingdom of God and this was the Cause for which he gave his life, the Church has to follow him, it has to believe as he did. There is no space for the self-coronation of the Church, no room for ecclesial centralism.

It is the Church as a whole that has overcome — in theory at least — ecclesial centralism: the Church is not the centre, the Kingdom is. And furthermore, the Church is not the Kingdom. The Church is simply “the seed of and the beginning of the Kingdom”, and while not alone it is very significant. It is a “mediation of the Kingdom”. It is at the service of the Kingdom. Its only role is to serve it, build it, draw close to it, encourage it. It owes it an eternal debt. To work for and be worn out by the Kingdom: this is the objective and most profound sense of the Church.

The Church is not a separate world, a ghetto centred around itself with its own codes. Being Church is “to live and struggle for Jesus’ Cause, the Kingdom” or “to believe like him”. This is the Church’s mission and the mission of Christians. And because the Kingdom is life, truth, justice, peace, fraternity, love ... this Christian mission coincides with the mission of any human being. It is the “great mission” of human beings on this earth. Jesus did not want to remove us from our human mission, but to deepen our commitment to it with his own Spirit. And this is what he did. And doing it again (“believing like him”) is what the Church and Latin American Spirituality must do.

8. *Political holiness*

The experience of God which Jesus had, the Spirit, the fire he carried inside, led him to forgo a private life to confront “the sins of the world”, the world that God so loved (Jn 3:16) that he sent his only Son (Jn 3:17). The same world into which Jesus sent his disciples. Jesus lived a truly “public life”, not only opposed to the “hidden world” in Nazareth, unknown to

us, but superimposed above his “family” or “private” life. The message of the Kingdom that Jesus preached had to do with the social and political structures of his time, which were moved by his preaching and his praxis. Finally, his death was a consequence of this public challenge of the proclamation of the will of God in a world structure of sin.

Believing like Jesus today means doing the same thing in a world that has become much more complicated, but which has the same fundamental ethical problems and the same need to hear the Good News. God did not want to “save us from the world”, not even for us to be “saved in this world”, but he wanted us to “save the world”. That “we be in the world but not of the world”, he said exactly. And today, and for various centuries, the world has become aware of the inevitable political dimension that forms part of reality and being ignorant of this does not remove our responsibility.

In trying to “believe like Jesus” would believe today, Latin America Spirituality fights for truth, justice and peace, human rights, international law, the creation of new fraternal structures ... greater virtues to correct and complement the classic virtues that are more domestic, individualist, spiritualist.

9. *Macro-ecumenism and religious dialogue*

Jesus was not a “professional ecclesiast”. The centre of his faith was not the Church, but the Kingdom, and he proclaimed the construction of this Kingdom as an eschatological criteria for the salvation that will judge all humans (Mt 25:31 ff). It is a totally ecumenical criteria, not ecclesial, not confessional, not even religious. It is above all creeds, races and cultures.

Believing like Jesus today means measuring everything against the Kingdom. That is why we feel closer to those who fight for the Cause of Jesus, maybe without even knowing it, than to those, even some of whom use his name, who are opposed to it.

This is tremendous, but real and evangelical. Jesus himself felt the same kind of closeness. He identified more with the Samaritan than with the priest and the Levite, more with the liberation of the oppressed than with the temple (Lk 10:25 ff); closer to the humble sinners than to the Pharisees satisfied with themselves (Lk 15:1-32; 18:10-15); closer to those who carry out the will of God than those who say “Lord, Lord” (Mt 7:21); closer to those who give food to the beggar without knowing Jesus (Mt 25:31 ff) than those who work miracles in his name (Mt 7:22); closer to those who say “no” but do God’s will than those who say “yes” but do not do God’s will (Mt 21:28-32).

Jesus does not have his sights set on the pettiness of the Church. Optimistic from his vision of faith, Jesus looks beyond and sees the immense fields of grain planted by God before the Church was built and today are harvested by many (Mt 9:38). Jesus does not send us out to plant but to harvest the immense fields that have been there since before his time. Optimistic with respect to the salvation of the world, a contemplative vision of reality, a positive attitude towards dialogue and a willingness to meet others, lack of interest in the institutional ... are the macro-ecumenical attitudes held by Jesus that Latin American Spirituality wants to make its own.

In summary, it is not so much about believing “in Jesus” as believing “like Jesus” with his “spirituality of the Kingdom”. There are many who believe “in him”, but do not believe “like him”. And we know that the devils also believe “in him” but it does not help them.

“Follow Jesus”, a metaphor that is often over used, does not mean following the exotic paths he followed, but in following our own path “the way he followed his”, facing the world and History like Jesus did with rebellion and hope, utopia and realism, indignation, tenderness, struggle and contemplation and, above all, a perspective of the Kingdom as the centre of all things.

He followed his path in his time, nearly 2,000 years ago, and we are not going to repeat it because his world no longer exists. Imitation and repetition have no meaning because we are on a different stretch of the path, neoliberal today, and we need to be creative in our faith not trying to do what he did but what he would do today, or believing today the way he would believe with the same “spirituality of the Kingdom”.

This is the basis of Latin American Spirituality.

Ref.: *LADOC*, vol. XXVIII, Jan. / Feb. 1998.

1998 MAPUTO CONSULTATION FOR A MORE CO-ORDINATED PASTORAL RESPONSE TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN AFRICA

FINAL STATEMENT – 29 JANUARY 1998

We, three Archbishops, including the President of SECAM, three Bishops, 12 priests, two religious women, and seven lay faithful from 11 African countries present at this consultation, have reflected at length on the Church's pastoral identity among forcibly displaced people in Africa, the formation of pastoral agents for that apostolic work, and the pastoral institutions and structures needed to make the presence of Christ felt in the tragic situations of uprooted peoples in our Family of the Church in Africa:

1. Identity:

Regarding the Church's identity among refugees and displaced people, both those in rural and in urban environments, we wish to highlight its special character that complements the contribution of other humanitarian and political agencies. That includes its specific mission and motivation flowing from the Scriptures and prayerful knowledge of Jesus Christ, its insistence on the human dignity of each person, its advocacy on the part of the voiceless in proclaiming God's justice to the nations, its call to form a community reconciled by Jesus Christ of peoples of all ethnic origins, and its duty to prophetically discern injustices and other factors causing forced displacement well before it occurs. Therefore the presence of the Church among refugees and displaced people is of utmost importance.

We want expressions of organic pastoral solidarity, like the "Pastors Without Borders" (Pastoral Agents Without Borders) but know they can function only if they are known and supported at all levels of the Church in Africa: parishes, Dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, representations of the Holy See, and IMBISA itself.

2. Formation:

With that vision of ministry in mind, we recognize the need to deal more explicitly and extensively with these issues in the initial formation of priests, seminarians, religious men and women, and lay faithful, and in ongoing formation too. In particular the Bishops and formation personnel among the participants will assure:

a) that during this 1998 academic year the content of seminary formation programmes is critically reviewed and brought into line with the recommendations of the 1986 "Letter on the Pastoral care of People on the Move in the Formation of Future priests" (Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral

Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, "Letter on the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility in the Formation of Future Priests" of 25 January 1986), and implemented by the last semester of the academic year;

b) that seminarians are encouraged to develop a love and desire to offer pastoral service to the forcibly displaced through direct supervised ministry among them, even in other countries of Africa;

c) that seminarians develop the cross-cultural skills needed for it by learning other languages and even by doing part of their formation in other countries of Africa;

d) that similar approaches be promoted in insti

tutes for formation of religious and of lay faithful;

e) that some pastoral agents, especially those experienced in ministry among the forcibly displaced, be sent for further studies in the area of forced human mobility so that by the end of 1999 each Episcopal Conference of the region may have at least one expert. His/her role will be to serve as a resource person for pastoral agents in the field and in formation programmes.

The Secretary General of IMBISA and the Chairman of the IMBISA Refugee Service, both present at this consultation, will take up these issues with those responsible for the relevant departments in the IMBISA Secretariat as well as in their respective Episcopal Conferences.

The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People will also pursue this issue with the Congregation for Catholic Education.

3. Pastoral Structures and Institutions:

Recognizing that well formed pastoral agents need a suitable institutional framework to support their ministry among the forcibly displaced, we note:

a) that we want expressions of organic pastoral solidarity, like the "Pastors Without Borders" (Pastoral Agents Without Borders) but know they can function only if they are known and supported at all levels of the Church in Africa: parishes, Dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, representations of the Holy See, and IMBISA itself;

b) that a database of pastoral agents and contacts, maintained by the IMBISA Refugee Service, is needed as an instrument for promoting pastoral solidarity in the region and on the continent;

c) that promoting and co-ordinating ministry among the forcibly displaced requires an institu-

tional point of reference in each Episcopal Conference of IMBISA;

d) that mechanisms of pastoral responses to emergency situations still need to be elaborated and organised;

e) that visits of Bishops and priests made by both Churches sending and receiving to groups of the faithful living in exile are very important expressions of the Church's solidarity with the forcibly displaced. Priests should make an effort to accompany their own flock into exile.

Regarding the Church's identity among refugees and displaced people, we wish to highlight its special character that complements the contribution of other humanitarian and political agencies. That includes its specific mission and motivation flowing from the Scriptures and prayerful knowledge of Jesus Christ, its insistence on the human dignity of each person, its advocacy on the part of the voiceless in proclaiming God's justice to the nations.

The IMBISA Refugee Service undertakes to pursue these points, organise the workshops and study sessions to promote them when necessary, and maintain contact with the Pontifical Council concerning progress in these areas.

4. Handbook for the Pastoral Care of Forcibly Displaced People:

The results of all three consultations will be collated and edited by the Pontifical Council in the hopes of developing a useful pastoral resource.

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COMING EVENTS

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The Message of the Church for Asia / Messages from Asia for the Church

April 21 (Tuesday)

ANSELMO LEE, PAX ROMANA ICMICA ASIA, GENERAL SECRETARY

Lay Participation in Renewing and Building the Asian Church for the Third Millennium

ARCHBISHOP ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO, O.M.I., VIGAN, PHILIPPINES

The Basic Ecclesial Community as a Church Model for Asia

April 24 (Friday)

REV. TOM MICHEL, S.J., SECRETARY FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE (JESUIT CURIA); ECUMENICAL SECRETARY FOR FABC.

Interreligious Dialogue in the Context of the Instrumentum Laboris

BISHOP JOHN TONG, HONG KONG

The Church in China: Challenges and Hopes

April 28 (Tuesday)

ANTHONY ROGERS, FSC, FABC OFFICE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Living Dialogue with the Poor

BISHOP STEPHEN FUMIO HAMAO, YOKOHAMA, JAPAN

Commitment for World Peace

May 5 (Tuesday)

CORA MATEO, FABC OFFICE OF THE LAITY, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) - Towards Becoming a More Participatory Church

BISHOP JOHN JOSEPH, FAISALABAD, PAKISTAN

The Challenges of Religious Fundamentalism and Violence to Social Harmony

May 8 (Friday)

ARCHBISHOP PAUL NABIL SAYAH, MARONITE ARCHBISHOP OF HAIFA

Christian-Muslim Relations in the Middle East

BISHOP CARLOS FILIPE XIMENES BELO, S.D.B., DILI, EAST TIMOR

Values for the Third Millennium

May 12 (Tuesday)

PROF. DR. FELIX WILFRED, DEPT. OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES, UNI. OF MADRAS

The Shifting Asian Sociopolitical Scenario and the Challenges to Christian Engagement and Theology

SISTER EUGENIA D' COSTA, RNDM, INTER-FAITH-DIALOGUE COMMISSION, BANGALADESH

Women and Interreligious Dialogue in the Life of the Church in Bangladesh

May 15 (Friday)

SR. VANDANA MATA, RSCJ ASHRAM MINISTRY, RETREAT MINISTRY

Integration of Indian and Christian Spirituality

BISHOP ANICETUS SINAGA, SIBOLGA, INDONESIA

Interreligious Relations Today in the South East Asian Context

Place. Brothers of the Christian Schools, Via Aurelia 476

Hour: 19.30 h - 22.00 h (Inscription 18.30 h) Translations: fr-it-sp

Entrance fee: Lire 7.000 for evening